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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes local school council (LSC) meetings in Chicago (Illinois) during their first year of operation. The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 created a radical shift in authority from the central bureaucracy to the LSCs, empowering the LSCs to set educational policy and govern schools. The councils hire and evaluate the principal, advise on important issues, including curriculum, textbook selection, and discipline, and approve a school improvement plan and budget. Meetings at eight elementary schools and four high schools were observed for the second half of the school year. The 12 schools are representative of the school system as a whole in terms of racial composition, size, and geographic location. The following summary findings are reported: (1) the average attendance rate for LSC members was 70 percent and attendance varied greatly from one council to another; (2) the average LSC discussed six different topics in each meeting, including the school program, LSC organization, building security and safety, finance, personnel, and parent and community involvement; and (3) discussions about overcrowding, school improvement planning, principal selection and contract, and safety, security, and discipline generated the highest participation by LSC members. Brief descriptions of the research methodology and 16 tables of statistical data illustrating the characteristics of participating schools and the numbers of LSC meetings observed are appended. (FMW)

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MONITORING AND RESEARCHING  
THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL  
REFORM IN CHICAGO

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LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETINGS DURING THE  
FIRST YEAR OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM

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with

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November 1990

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The Monitoring and Research staff of the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance would like to thank the local school councils and the faculty of the schools that graciously agreed to allow the Chicago Panel to observe their local school council meetings and school functions. This project would not have been possible without the assistance of these twelve local school councils. We are extremely grateful to these LSCs for allowing us to share in their efforts to implement school reform.

This report is the result of a collaborative effort of the Monitoring and Research staff of the Chicago Panel. John Easton and Sandra Storey completed the final stages of this report--the data analysis and writing. However, the entire project staff was heavily involved in all of the essential prior stages, including securing participation of schools, coordinating school observations, and collecting, checking and synthesizing the data presented here. All staff also helped edit the final version of this report. Cheryl Johnson coordinated the process of observing local school councils and developed an extensive database to store and analyze the information collected at local school council meetings. Cheryl Johnson and Jesse Qualls observed most of the meetings reported here. Darryl Ford, John Easton and Sandra Storey also observed some meetings. Jesse Qualls and Darryl Ford spent hours verifying data files against the observational notes. All staff members helped to develop codes to categorize the content of local school council meetings. We checked and rechecked the codes to make sure they had been consistently applied. Susan Ryan, who joined the staff in September, independently coded topics for a final check. This project could not have been completed without the contribution of each member of the Monitoring and Research staff.

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## I. SUMMARY

The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 created elected local school councils to set educational policy and govern schools. The councils hire and evaluate the principal, they recommend and advise on important issues, including curriculum, textbook selection, discipline and attendance, and they approve a school improvement plan and budget. This radical shift in authority from the central bureaucracy to the local school has generated attention in Chicago and across the country. The public and council members themselves want to know what the LSCs are accomplishing and, ultimately, whether they are improving the quality of education in Chicago.

The purpose of this study is to provide some basic information about local school council meetings during the first year of Chicago School Reform. The report analyzes the content of council meetings and the participation of council members in discussions, including the length of meetings and the attendance of members and visitors. Questions about who attends council meetings, what business is conducted, and who participates must be answered before we examine the relationships between councils and school improvement. These are essential elements of the councils' efforts to effect change and improvement in their schools.

Staff from the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance observed council meetings for the second half of the school year in 12 schools--eight elementary and four high schools. These 12 schools are representative of the school system as a whole in terms of racial characteristics, size, and geographic location, but we do not claim that all LSCs operated as these councils did. We hope instead that our data will illustrate the distinctive ways that different local school councils operate and help council members evaluate the effectiveness of their own councils through a process of self-analysis.

### Attendance at LSC Meetings

In the elementary schools, the average attendance rate for LSC members was 70 percent or almost eight members per meeting. In the high schools, attendance was somewhat higher at 78 percent or about eight and a half members (without including the student member). Attendance varied greatly from one council to another, ranging from a high average of 9.6 council members present to a low average of 6.8 members. Nine of the 12 schools had a core of one half or more of their members who attended most meetings. Attendance also varied from member to member. Principals attended nearly all meetings. The chairpersons and teachers attended almost 90 percent of the meetings. The community

members attended about two-thirds of the meetings and the other parents (not counting the chair) attended slightly less often. (See Table A.) Absence of members was a concern in at least two of the councils; these councils investigated possible ways of removing or requesting that non-attending members resign from the council.

*Table A*  
*Council member attendance rates*

| Principal | Chairperson | Other<br>parents | Teachers | Community<br>members | Student |
|-----------|-------------|------------------|----------|----------------------|---------|
| 97.3      | 87.8        | 61.7             | 87.7     | 67.1                 | 52.2    |

### Content of Council Meetings

In the sample schools, the average LSC discussed about six different issues or topics in each meeting. Of all the topics that councils discussed, **School Program Topics** were most frequent. These include Curriculum and Instruction, School Improvement Planning, School Administration, and Overcrowding. (See Table B.) **LSC Organization Topics** (LSC Procedures and LSC Training) were next most frequent. Next in order were **Building, Security & Safety** topics, **Finance** (Budgeting and School Fund Raising), **Personnel** (Principal Selection & Contract and Other Personnel), **Parent & Community Involvement** and **Other** topics. Some councils spent a great deal of time on School Program issues and others spent almost no time on these topics. Similarly, some councils spent much time on LSC Organization topics, whereas other councils spent little time on them. Councils that had higher average member attendance considered a greater percent of School Program issues than councils with lower attendance.

Councils differed in what topics they considered and in how they addressed them. For example, one council whose school was severely overcrowded discussed this issue at all meetings. These meetings had high attendance and many members participated in discussions. This council took a very active role in looking for new space and developing alternative plans to relieve overcrowding. Another council developed a dress code to reduce gang problems in the school. Council members cooperated with students who requested a special meeting to discuss this issue. These council members discussed and heard comments from parents and students on the positive and negative aspects of a school dress code. One council that we observed experienced some conflict among the members regarding the process to be used to select the principal. Rather than following procedures recommended by the principal selection committee, the council unexpectedly went into closed session to interview the principal and offered a contract during that meeting.

*Table B*  
*Number and percent of topics and average participation*

| <i>Categories (in boldface) and subcategories</i> | <i>% of all topics discussed</i> | <i>Average # of LSC members participating</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>School Program Topics</b>                      | <b>28.5</b>                      | <b>3.2</b>                                    |
| Curriculum and Instruction                        | 12.4                             | 3.1                                           |
| School Improvement Planning                       | 6.2                              | 4.2                                           |
| School Administration                             | 7.3                              | 2.2                                           |
| Overcrowding                                      | 2.6                              | 4.3                                           |
| <b>LSC Organizational Topics</b>                  | <b>21.5</b>                      | <b>3.1</b>                                    |
| LSC Procedures                                    | 19.3                             | 3.1                                           |
| LSC Training                                      | 8.2                              | 3.0                                           |
| <b>Building, Security &amp; Safety Topics</b>     | <b>13.3</b>                      | <b>3.6</b>                                    |
| School Infrastructure                             | 3.4                              | 2.8                                           |
| Security, Safety & Discipline                     | 9.9                              | 3.8                                           |
| <b>Finance Topics</b>                             | <b>10.9</b>                      | <b>3.0</b>                                    |
| Finance and Budgeting                             | 7.3                              | 2.9                                           |
| School Fund Raising                               | 3.6                              | 3.1                                           |
| <b>Personnel Topics</b>                           | <b>10.7</b>                      | <b>3.4</b>                                    |
| Principal Selection & Contract                    | 6.0                              | 3.9                                           |
| Other Personnel                                   | 4.7                              | 2.6                                           |
| <b>Parent and Community Involvement</b>           | <b>4.3</b>                       | <b>2.2</b>                                    |
| <b>Other</b>                                      | <b>4.7</b>                       | <b>2.2</b>                                    |

### Participation at Meetings

Overcrowding, School Improvement Planning, Principal Selection and Contract, and Safety, Security and Discipline generated the highest participation of all topics--an average of four members discussed these topics when they came before the councils. The relatively high participation in these topics may mean that they were the most urgent or most important business to come before the councils. On the other hand, they may have been the topics that more council members felt comfortable discussing.

Participation was lower (about two members) for School Administration, Parent and Community Involvement, and Other topics. Often, these topics came before the councils as announcements that did not require much response or create much interest. Participation averaged about three members for the remaining topics, as shown in Table B.

Participation also differed from person to person on the LSCs. (See Table C.) The principal participated more than any other council member. The chairperson participated next most frequently, followed by the teachers, then the community members, and finally by the other parents (not including the chairperson). Participation varied greatly from school to school. For example, one principal participated in 96.3 percent of all topics, whereas another (an interim principal who was not retained) participated in only 38 percent of all topics. Chairperson participation varied even more, from a high of 100 percent to a low of 10.5 percent. There is similar variability in participation for the other council members as well.

*Table C*  
*Council member participation rates*

| Principal | Chairperson | Other<br>parents | Teachers | Community<br>members | Student |
|-----------|-------------|------------------|----------|----------------------|---------|
| 66.3      | 43.4        | 17.0             | 31.6     | 27.5                 | 4.4     |

The participation of members of the councils varied by role and by topic. For example, principals participated in 82 percent of all School Program topics but only 25 percent of all Parent and Community Involvement topics. Chairpersons participated in 52 percent of Building, Security and Safety topics but only 34 percent of all School Program issues. Parents participated relatively most often in Personnel topics (21 percent of them) and in 11 percent of the Other topics. The teachers also participated relatively most often in Personnel topics (39 percent), and relatively least in Other topics (16 percent). For community members, participation ranged from 34 percent for Building and Safety to 21 percent for parent and community involvement.

We hope that this report will stimulate additional research on local school councils. In the future, our work will probe questions about **how and why** council behaviors are related to educational improvements.

We also hope that this report will encourage councils to reflect on whether they are considering the issues that they believe are most important to the school, whether all members actively participate in council decisions, and how they can make changes in how they operate to best serve the needs of their school. Though these are not the only issues that a council should consider in self-evaluation, they will provide an important starting point.

## II. INTRODUCTION

The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 created elected local school councils to set educational policy and govern schools. The councils hire and evaluate the principal, they recommend and advise on important issues, including curriculum, textbook selection, discipline and attendance, and they approve a school improvement plan and budget. This radical shift in authority from the central bureaucracy to the local school has generated attention in Chicago and across the country. The public and council members themselves want to know what the LSCs are accomplishing and, ultimately, whether they are improving the quality of education in Chicago.

This study of local school council operations is part of a five year project, "Monitoring and Researching the Implementation of School Reform in Chicago." One goal of the Monitoring Project is to assess whether and how the Chicago School Reform Act is implemented. The Monitoring Project will also study the impact of school reform on school outcomes like achievement, attendance and graduation rates, and on the educational and employment status of graduates of Chicago public high schools.

Though the long-term monitoring and research project is designed to assess the effects of school reform, this first-year report on local school council operations is not an evaluation of school reform in Chicago or a chronicle of the success or failure of individual LSCs. After only one year of school reform, it is much too early for us to draw conclusions about the impact of this radical reorganization of school governance on education in Chicago.

The purpose of this report is to describe and analyze local school council operations at 74 council meetings that we observed in 12 schools during the second half of the 1989-90 school year. The results from these twelve schools cannot be generalized to all local school councils in Chicago. At the same time, we feel that the results from our sample schools represent a broad enough range to give some insight into the distinctive ways that different local school councils operate. Also, this study may provide clues about processes that are common to many councils.

We concentrated on three important components of LSC operations. These are:

**Attendance.** Do council members attend LSC meetings regularly? How much does council attendance differ from one school to another?

**Meeting Content.** What topics do councils address? Are the councils discussing substantive issues related to school improvement or are they preoccupied with other issues?

**Participation.** Who participates during council meetings? Do a few individuals dominate the meetings? Do council members participate more frequently in some topic areas than they do in others?

In addition, the report contains a lengthy description of how one council grappled with a complex issue over an extended period of time in order to demonstrate LSC operations in richer detail.

These questions represent the essential and basic needs for effective decision making as envisioned by the Chicago School Reform Act. The report presents evidence relevant to each of the three areas to provide information, as well as to suggest questions, about how councils begin to bring about change and improvements in their schools.

We think that information from this study will be useful in at least two ways. First, we hope that this study will encourage councils to be self-reflective about how they operate and to think about the attendance and participation of members and visitors at LSC meetings as well as about the types of issues that they discuss frequently and infrequently. In evaluating themselves in these areas councils may wish to consider how to encourage higher attendance and participation from their members. Councils can also assess whether they are actually discussing subjects that they consider to be important or whether they are spending too much time on topics of little significance to them.

In addition, these findings should be useful for planning other larger scale research studies including surveys to teachers, parents, and council members that will draw on a broader sample. Results from larger scale studies with bigger samples can be used to make better generalizations about how local school councils operate than can this more limited study. On the other hand, this more in-depth study provides a richness of detail unavailable in a survey study. We hope our study will provoke other research about school reform and local school councils and generate hypotheses that we and other researchers can test in subsequent studies.

This study is the first of a series of studies that attempt to trace the development of school based management in Chicago and its relationship to school improvement. Separate, related reports will describe the results of interviews of principals and LSC chairs and surveys of all council members as well as analyzing the content of school improvement plans. Since we will continue to study these same schools for several years, we will trace changing leadership patterns and governance, and watch for and study the effects of new school programs that result from the actions of the councils.

This report emphasizes quantitative description of the attendance of LSC members, of the content of the meetings, and of the participation of members. Qualitative evidence is used to supplement and illustrate the main points of the numerical evidence. Subsequent reports will rely more heavily on non-statistical information.

### **III. BACKGROUND OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM**

The 1988 Chicago School Reform Act created local school councils in 542 Chicago public schools. These LSCs are responsible for hiring and evaluating a principal, approving a budget developed by the principal, making recommendations on textbooks, advising the principal on attendance and disciplinary policies, approving a school improvement plan,

reporting publicly on progress and problems involved in implementing the plan, and evaluating the allocation of staff in the school. According to the Act, the LSC is "the essential unit for educational governance and improvement" that places "the primary responsibility for school governance . . . in the hands of parents, community residents, teachers, and the school principal at the school level." Previously, Chicago Board of Education staff at the central office exerted significant power and authority in how these matters were dealt with in individual schools.

The Reform Act assumes that increased local authority, involving the most highly invested constituents, is the best way to improve the Chicago Public Schools. The Act has several very specific goals for improved performance including increased achievement as measured by nationally normed standardized tests, increased school attendance and graduation rates, and improved preparation for employment and further study.

Local school council elections took place in elementary schools on October 11, 1989 and in high schools on October 12, 1989. Each school was supposed to elect six parents, two teachers and two community residents to its council. The principal automatically became a member of the council. High schools also elected one non-voting student member. The councils took office immediately following the elections.

#### **IV. PROCEDURES**

##### Overview

This observational study took place in twelve Chicago Public Schools--four high schools and eight elementary schools--during the second half of the 1989-90 school year. The Appendix to this report (pages 44-46) describes the sample schools and the process of selecting schools and securing their permission for this study.

##### Collecting data

During the fall of 1989, following LSC elections, staff from the Chicago Panel began attending LSC meetings in schools throughout the city to learn about the content and procedures of the council meetings. During the preliminary observations we took detailed notes and collected agendas and minutes from previous meetings. Using this information, we developed our data collection procedures and instruments.

After a council had approved our request to study the implementation of school reform in its school, we attended every meeting (except when time conflicts prevented us) and recorded attendance of members, attendance of adult and children guests (that is, all non-council members, including presenters, consultants, sales persons, central office staff, school staff, parents, and other observers--except ourselves--who were present), availability of agenda and minutes to guests, and who chaired the meeting. We took notes throughout the meeting, organizing these notes around "topics" that the councils considered. (A topic is a discrete item or subject that is reported or discussed at a meeting. Often a topic is equivalent to an agenda item. At other times one agenda item covers many topics.) For

each topic considered at a meeting, the observer recorded which members participated in a topic discussion, whether special problems occurred during the discussion, and whether the topic came to a vote.

Two observers had primary responsibility for covering all LSC meetings in the twelve schools. Three other observers served as "back ups" to attend meetings as substitutes. The observers met together regularly to discuss data collection procedures and to review their notes and completed forms.

### Observing LSC meetings

This report analyzes the content of 74 LSC meetings between late January and the end of August in 12 schools. From the time when each school agreed to participate until the end of August, these LSCs conducted a total of 90 meetings. We missed 16 of these meetings. Most of these occurred early in the study, when we had not established consistent means of learning about changed meeting times or dates. Some missed meetings occurred because special meetings conflicted with regularly scheduled meetings in other schools. It required several months of observing councils for us to establish reliable communications with councils as we and they developed new schedules and procedures. We expect to observe a higher proportion of council meetings during 1990-91. Table 13 in the Appendix (page 46) shows how many meetings we covered for each of the twelve schools.

## **V. RESULTS**

Because we promised anonymity to the schools that agreed to participate in this study, we have coded each school with a letter. Schools A through H are elementary schools and schools W through Z are high schools.

### Length of Meetings and Attendance of Visitors

In the twelve schools, the average meeting lasted 126.2 minutes, slightly more than two hours. Of course there was a lot of variability from meeting to meeting and from school to school. School W had the shortest meetings (on average 89 minutes) and School D had the longest meetings (on average 162 minutes, about two and three-quarters hours). See Table 13 in the Appendix for school by school averages. Of the 74 meetings we observed, the shortest was 15 minutes long and the longest was 220 minutes (three hours and forty minutes).

We observed five meetings that lasted for less than one hour. One meeting ended early because it was disrupted by a parent in the audience; one ended early because the principal needed to leave and the remaining members did not constitute a quorum; two meetings did not have quorums but discussed council matters for a short amount of time while waiting for additional members to arrive; and one short meeting was called expressly to discuss a single topic.

The average adult "audience" size ranged from 1.8 at School A to 33.6 at School Y. Overall, an average of 6.3 adults attended the 8 elementary school LSC meetings and 17.9 adults attended the four high school council meetings. Several of the meetings with highest attendance were well publicized meetings that dealt with important topics, including principal selection and school improvement planning. High attendance in at least one meeting resulted from a conflict between parents on the council and other parents over the content of a parent workshop.

Some children were also present at council meetings though, on the average, relatively few children attended meetings. (Some schools made alternative provisions for children of council members and guests, including opening the gym in one school and the computer room in another for them to use while their parents attended council meetings.)

### Attendance of LSC Members

We have several ways of presenting attendance data for the LSC members. Table 1 shows the average number of members present by school and by "role" (principal, parents, teachers, community members, and students) for the meetings that we observed. This illustrates the variance in overall average attendance from school to school (but not from meeting to meeting). In the eight elementary schools, an average of 7.7 (or 70.0 percent) of 11 LSC members<sup>1</sup> were present at each LSC meeting. In the eight elementary schools, the lowest average number of members present at meetings was 6.8 and the highest was 9.3. In the four high schools in this sample, an average of 9.1 (75.8 percent) members out of 12 were present at each meeting<sup>2</sup>. The high school average attendance at meetings that we observed ranged from a low of 7.2 members to a high of 10.1. In order to compare high schools to elementary schools, we removed the student member from the calculation. Not including the student member, the high school average attendance was 8.6 members (78.1 percent) out of 11. In our sample of local school councils, attendance was higher in the high schools than in the elementary schools.

Table 2 below shows the average overall attendance rates<sup>3</sup> by role in the council. In this table we have separated the attendance rate of the chairperson (a parent) from the attendance of the other parents. We found that of the 74 meetings, the principals combined attended 97.3 percent of the time, the chairpersons attended 87.8 percent, the other parents attended 61.7 percent, the teachers attended 87.7 percent, the community members attended 67.1 percent, and the student members in the four high school LSCs attended 52.2 percent

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<sup>1</sup>At seven of the 51 elementary meetings that we observed, there were unfilled vacancies which reduced the total membership to 10 instead of 11 members for one or more meetings.

<sup>2</sup>At one of the 23 high school meetings that we observed, an unfilled vacancy reduced the total membership to 11 instead of 12 members.

<sup>3</sup>All attendance statistics describe only the meetings that we attended.

of the meetings. These attendance rates differed from person to person within role as well as from school to school. Some of the school to school variation is shown in the table.

Table 1

| <i>Average number of LSC members present - by role</i>          |                    |                          |                |                  |                 |                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <i>School</i>                                                   | <i>All members</i> | <i>Community members</i> | <i>Parents</i> | <i>Principal</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Student</i> |
| <i>A</i>                                                        | 7.4                | 0.6                      | 3.8            | 1.0              | 2.0             | n/a            |
| <i>B</i>                                                        | 7.0                | 0.8                      | 3.5            | 1.0              | 1.7             | n/a            |
| <i>C</i>                                                        | 7.9                | 1.8                      | 3.3            | 1.0              | 1.9             | n/a            |
| <i>D</i>                                                        | 9.3                | 1.7                      | 4.8            | 0.8              | 2.0             | n/a            |
| <i>E</i>                                                        | 6.8                | 0.3                      | 3.8            | 1.0              | 1.8             | n/a            |
| <i>F</i>                                                        | 7.5                | 1.3                      | 3.5            | 0.8              | 1.8             | n/a            |
| <i>G</i>                                                        | 7.3                | 1.0                      | 3.8            | 1.0              | 1.6             | n/a            |
| <i>H</i>                                                        | 7.7                | 1.4                      | 3.9            | 1.0              | 1.4             | n/a            |
| <i>W</i>                                                        | 7.2                | 0.8                      | 2.8            | 1.0              | 1.8             | 0.8            |
| <i>X</i>                                                        | 9.0                | 2.0                      | 4.0            | 1.0              | 1.7             | 0.3            |
| <i>Y</i>                                                        | 9.6                | 1.7                      | 4.6            | 1.0              | 2.0             | 0.3            |
| <i>Z</i>                                                        | 10.1               | 2.0                      | 5.1            | 1.0              | 1.4             | 0.6            |
| <i>ELEM AVG</i>                                                 | 7.7                | 1.2                      | 3.8            | 1.0              | 1.8             | n/a            |
| <i>HS AVG</i>                                                   | 9.1                | 1.7                      | 4.3            | 1.0              | 1.7             | 0.5            |
| <i>Schools A-H are elementary schools, W-Z are high schools</i> |                    |                          |                |                  |                 |                |

Whereas the principals and chairpersons had high attendance in all of the 12 schools, other (the five non-chairperson) parents and the community members had more variable attendance. Attendance for other parents ranged from a high of 82.5 percent at one school to a low of 37.5 percent at another. Teachers' average attendance rates ranged from 100 percent in one school to 68.8 percent in another. In the school with 100 percent teacher attendance, both teachers attended all council meetings. In the school with the lowest teacher attendance, one teacher attended all eight meetings and the second attended three out of eight meetings. (This one teacher with low attendance had taken a leave of absence to care for a sick family member. The council explored ways of appointing a temporary replacement but chose to wait until the teacher returned.)

Table 2

| <i>Average attendance rates for LSC members</i> |                     |                            |                           |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                                 | <i>Average rate</i> | <i>Highest school rate</i> | <i>Lowest school rate</i> |
| <i>Principal</i>                                | 97.3                | 100.0                      | 83.3                      |
| <i>Chair</i>                                    | 87.8                | 100.0                      | 66.7                      |
| <i>Other parents</i>                            | 61.7                | 82.5                       | 37.5                      |
| <i>Teachers</i>                                 | 87.7                | 100.0                      | 68.8                      |
| <i>Community</i>                                | 67.1                | 100.0                      | 16.7                      |
| <i>Student</i>                                  | 52.2                | 80.0                       | 28.6                      |

Community members had an extremely high range in average attendance--from 100 percent in one school to 16.7 percent in another. In the council with the lowest community member attendance, one member attended one out of four meetings. The second member did not attend two meetings that we observed, then resigned. (The attendance rate of 16.7 percent is one meeting out of six possible. We have excluded the vacancies. If we had included them, the community member attendance rate for this council would be 12.5 percent--one out of eight.)

The students in the four high schools attended about half of the meetings. The student with the highest attendance attended four out of five meetings (80 percent) and the student with the lowest attendance attended only two out of seven (28.6 percent).

The average attendance rates do not answer important questions about differences from one member to another. Do all members have roughly equal attendance or do some members have extremely high attendance and others have extremely low? In order to summarize these comparisons, we classified all members by their attendance rates, counting those who attended 75 percent or more of the meetings, those who attended more than 50 percent but less than 75 percent, those who attended more than 25 percent but less than half, and those who attended fewer than 25 percent of their meetings.

Most councils had a core of high attending members. In nine of the twelve sample schools, more than one half of the members attended between 75 and 100 percent of their meetings. Even among the schools with relatively low attendance, most had a core of over half of the LSC members who attended more than 75 percent of the meetings. Four of the nine schools that had a core of high attenders also had a core of three or more members who attended fewer than half of the meetings. Three schools did not have a majority core of high attending members (75 percent or more meetings). However, nearly all of the members of these three councils attended more than 50 percent of the meetings.

All of the principals attended 75 percent or more of the meetings as did 83.3 percent (ten of the twelve) of the chairs. (One chairperson in the 50 to 74.9 percent range attended two of the three meetings that we observed. This may be an underestimate because of the small number of meetings involved.) As we have already seen, the principals and chairpersons have very high attendance.

Table 3

| <i>Distribution of LSC member attendance rates</i> |                  |                    |                      |                          |                 |                |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <i>Attendance</i>                                  | <i>Principal</i> | <i>Chairperson</i> | <i>Other parents</i> | <i>Community members</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Student</i> |
| <i>75% TO 100%</i>                                 | 100.0            | 83.3               | 32.3                 | 50.0                     | 88.0            | 25.0           |
| <i>50% TO 74.9%</i>                                | 0.0              | 16.7               | 37.1                 | 25.0                     | 8.0             | 25.0           |
| <i>25% TO 49.9%</i>                                | 0.0              | 0.0                | 21.0                 | 4.2                      | 4.0             | 50.0           |
| <i>0% TO 24.9%</i>                                 | 0.0              | 0.0                | 9.7                  | 20.8                     | 0.0             | 0.0            |

Other parent (non-chairperson) attendance was highly variable. Table 3 shows that slightly fewer than one-third of the non-chair parents had high attendance (75 percent or more of the meetings), that over one-third attended between 50 percent and 75 percent of the meetings, and that slightly less than one-third of the non-chair parents attended fewer than 50 percent of the meetings. Five parents attended less than one quarter of the LSC meetings. Community members also had highly variable attendance. Half of them attended 75 percent or more of the meetings. On the other hand, one-fifth of community members (five of them) attended less than 25 percent of the meetings. Community members had slightly better attendance than other parents, with a higher average attendance rate. In addition, community members were more apt than parents to have very good attendance (75% to 100%) or very low attendance (0% to 24.9%), whereas other parents were more likely to have fair or poor (between 25% and 74.9% percent) attendance.

In general, teacher members had good attendance. Most of the teacher members (88.0 percent) attended 75 percent or more of the council meetings. Only one teacher (4.0 percent) attended fewer than half of the meetings. (This is the same teacher mentioned earlier who took a leave of absence to care for a sick family member.)

Several councils expressed concern about the frequent absence of one or more of their members. This topic is discussed further in the section on the content of meetings.

### Meeting Topic Categories

Observers recorded the content of meetings in discrete "topics." We defined "topic" to be subject or content matter brought before the council. Topics often corresponded to agenda items but at other times were narrower. For example, "principal's report" was a common agenda item. We recorded topics in relation to the content of the report, like "test scores," "summer school schedule," or "new assistant principal." We recorded all of the business of the council meetings with the exception of approving minutes from the previous

meeting. We entered each topic into our database and then assigned each to a category.<sup>4</sup> Seven broad category areas are subdivided into a total of 15 subcategories. Our staff worked together to develop these categories by constantly referring to observational notes and adjusting category definitions until they could agree on what topics belonged in what category. The categories and their definitions follow.

### *SCHOOL PROGRAM ISSUES*

*Curriculum and instruction.* All council business related to classes, courses, subject matters, teaching methods and materials, and test scores are included here.

*School improvement planning.* This category contains all topics related to developing and evaluating the formal School Improvement Plan. This category includes only topics explicitly related to the formal, official Plan.

*School administration.* School administrative matters, including scheduling of classes, tests, meetings (not LSC), assemblies, teacher recognition days, school vacations; enrollment; summer school; and student photographs are classified in this category. For the most part, these matters are the day-to-day routines of running a school.

*Overcrowding.* This category contains business dealing with overcrowding including new construction, rental property and students from outside of the attendance area.

### *LSC ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS*

*LSC procedures and business.* This category contains topics that relate specifically to the mechanics of operating the LSC. It includes electing officers, setting meeting dates, developing and approving by-laws, setting up committees, discussing the attendance of LSC members, developing procedures and protocols for agendas and minutes, communication among members, replacing members, and raising funds for LSC expenses.

*LSC training.* This category contains all discussion about the training the LSC should pursue, training that it has received, the availability of training, the need for training, the scheduling of training, and the cost of training.

### *BUILDING, SECURITY, AND SAFETY*

*School infrastructure/building safety.* This grouping of LSC topics includes issues related to rehabilitation and renovation of school buildings; reports or

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<sup>4</sup>See page 46 for an explanation of our coding procedure.

discussions with janitors and engineers; discussions about the maintenance and cleanliness of the school, playground and yards. This does not include new construction and lack of space, which is included in *Overcrowding*.

*Security, safety and discipline issues.* These issues deal with the physical safety of students in the school and include discussions about gangs and fights, and schools rules and regulations about student behavior including attendance, truancy and dress codes.

## *FINANCE*

*Budgeting.* All topics dealing with official school budgeting, including special funds like chapter I, bilingual, and desegregation are included in this category.

*School fund raising.* All fund raising and budget matters regarding funds from outside the school system (for example, money from private grants, from vending machines and from fund raisers) are included here if the revenues are to be used for school programs. (Fund raising for LSC expenses, for example for printing LSC stationery, is included in *LSC Procedures and Business*.)

## *PERSONNEL*

*Principal selection, evaluation and contract.* All matters related to selecting and evaluating a principal and negotiating a contract are contained in this category.

*Other personnel.* This group of topics includes all business related to advertising, selecting, and hiring teachers and other staff. It also includes discussions about what type of staff is needed in the school.

## *PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT*

*Parent and community involvement.* This category contains items relating to parents and community, including parent clubs and committees and efforts to increase involvement in the school. It also includes communication and public relations between the school, home and community.

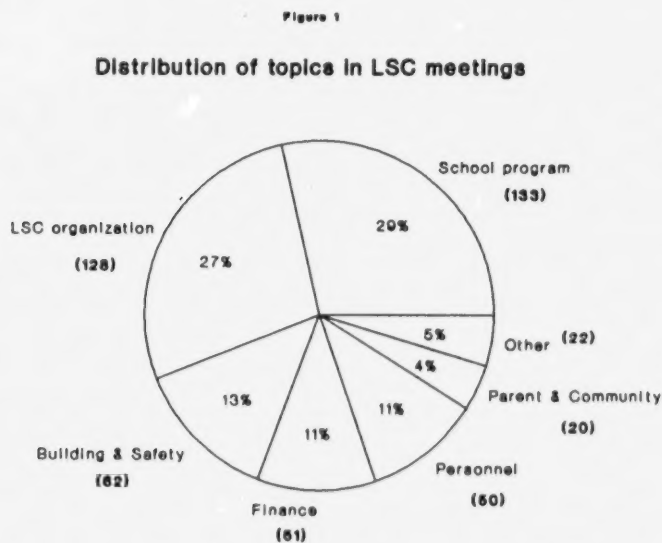
## *OTHER ISSUES*

*Other.* This is a catchall category for issues that cannot be included in the previous categories.

## Content of Meetings

We recorded a total of 466 topics of discussion in the 74 meetings that we attended. The average LSC considered 6.3 topics per meeting. These topics are simply classifications of the matters that the councils considered in their meetings. They are not weighted for time or importance. After describing the content of actual meetings in terms of the topics, this report examines them in greater depth by considering how many members participated in discussing each topic and whether the topic came to a vote. The participation and voting information will suggest the relative importance the councils attached to various issues.

This section on the content of meetings provides an overview of the frequency of topics within several broad category areas. After discussing the most common topics, we have included one or more detailed illustrations of how a council dealt with a particular topic in order to give a more in-depth view of what councils discussed.



The figure above shows the distribution of the 466 topics by the broad groups of categories discussed above. The most frequently discussed topics were related to School Programs (28.6 percent); an almost equal number of topics dealt with LSC Organizational Matters (27.5 percent). Building, Security and Safety was the next most prevalent set of topics (13.3 percent), followed by Finance (10.9 percent), Personnel (10.7 percent), Parent and Community Involvement (4.3 percent) and Other (4.7 percent). A more detailed discussion of these topics follows.

## School Program Topics

This group of topics contains four related subcategories: Curriculum and Instruction, School Improvement Planning, School Administration, and Overcrowding. Table 4 shows the distribution of all topics by broad category area and by subcategory.

Table 4

| <i>Number and percent of topics by category and sub-category area</i> |                                       |                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Categories (in boldface) and subcategories</i>                     | <i># of times topic was discussed</i> | <i>% of all topics discussed</i> |
| <b>School Program Topics</b>                                          | <b>133</b>                            | <b>28.5</b>                      |
| Curriculum and Instruction                                            | 58                                    | 12.4                             |
| School Improvement Planning                                           | 29                                    | 6.2                              |
| School Administration                                                 | 34                                    | 7.3                              |
| Overcrowding                                                          | 12                                    | 2.6                              |
| <b>LSC Organizational Topics</b>                                      | <b>128</b>                            | <b>27.5</b>                      |
| LSC Procedures                                                        | 90                                    | 19.3                             |
| LSC Training                                                          | 38                                    | 8.2                              |
| <b>Building, Security &amp; Safety Topics</b>                         | <b>62</b>                             | <b>13.3</b>                      |
| School Infrastructure                                                 | 16                                    | 3.4                              |
| Security, Safety & Discipline                                         | 46                                    | 9.9                              |
| <b>Finance Topics</b>                                                 | <b>51</b>                             | <b>10.9</b>                      |
| Budgeting                                                             | 34                                    | 7.3                              |
| School Fund Raising                                                   | 17                                    | 3.6                              |
| <b>Personnel Topics</b>                                               | <b>50</b>                             | <b>10.7</b>                      |
| Principal Selection & Contract                                        | 28                                    | 6.0                              |
| Other Personnel                                                       | 22                                    | 4.7                              |
| <b>Parent and Community Involvement</b>                               | <b>20</b>                             | <b>4.3</b>                       |
| <b>Other</b>                                                          | <b>22</b>                             | <b>4.7</b>                       |

The greatest number of the school program topics are related to curriculum and instruction. This is the largest subcategory in School Program topics, with 12.4 percent of all topics. Of the 58 topics in this subcategory, the greatest number (24) deal with course or program content, including the development of new programs or courses (summer school, after school programs, preschool programs, a creative writing course and a statistics course in high schools), preparation for summer school, the availability of gifted programs in one

school, the content of the school reading program, and content of a high school sex education class. These topics relate directly to the availability and content of the courses and programs for students. The second most prevalent group of topics in this subcategory deal with testing and test scores. Of the 58 curriculum and instruction topics discussed, nine focussed on the results of testing, testing procedures and test security. Channel One (a television news program that includes commercial advertising) was discussed seven different times, mainly by a single high school, making it the third most prevalent topic in this subcategory. Councils discussed the school board's draft promotion policy four times and textbook selection procedures three times. The remaining 12 topics include teacher training and inservice, school mission statement, high school graduation requirements, and the impact of proposed changes in busing on school programs.

At one of the high schools, a curriculum topic touched on what the extent of the LSC's role should be in individual student issues. The LSC chair had asked the principal to explain why a particular student would not be allowed to take two English courses the following year. The principal explained to the LSC that it was not his policy to encourage early graduation but that he did not prevent it either. He said that allowing the student to take two English classes would encourage early graduation. The student and his mother gave a presentation to the LSC and asked the LSC to vote and approve the students' request to take two English classes in the fall. The LSC discussed the request and decided that it was not the LSC's role to interfere with individual problems of students. They said that the LSC was concerned about issues that affect the entire student body. The principal added that he was not trying to force the student to attend school for another year because the student could always take the class in summer school.

At an elementary school, the LSC discussed textbook selection at one of the its meetings near the end of the 1989-90 school year. The LSC questioned the principal about textbooks and a community member asked the principal to provide the LSC with an inventory of textbooks and the years in which they were purchased. The community member intended to use this information to find out how old the books were and to see what needed to be updated.

The School Administration subcategory contains the second most frequently discussed topics in the area of School Programs. This category deals with administrative issues, including information issues about school calendars and events. Very often material in this subcategory was part of the principal's, and sometimes the chairperson's, report to the council. Several topics were announcements of dates for such events as teacher appreciation day, 8th grade open house, Project CANAL<sup>5</sup> retreats, International Day, school photographs, closing day program, graduation and honors dinner. Other topics included lunchroom prices and student awards.

Though these issues tended to be principals' reports and announcements there were a few cases in which school administration topics are not just reports but actual discussions.

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<sup>5</sup>CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning) is a special desegregation program supporting school based improvement planning.

In one such case, an LSC discussed the purchase of gym uniforms. All of the eight members present (the principal, two teachers, the chairperson, three other parents, and a community member) participated. The LSC discussed a proposal from one company and said that the school would sell the uniforms to parents at cost. The council then voted to buy the gym uniforms.

School Improvement Planning sub category topics dealt specifically with the School Improvement Plan mandated by the Reform Act. Many of the discussions about the School Improvement Plans were very involved and comprehensive. The topics that we recorded included discussions of conducting needs assessments and a survey, which are important parts in the process of developing an improvement plan.

At one of the elementary schools in the study, the principal presented her proposed school improvement plan (SIP) to the LSC at the first meeting we observed. During the presentation the chairperson and the two teacher members asked questions and made comments about the SIP. After the presentation, the principal suggested that LSC members review the SIP so that at the next meeting they could approve it with suggested improvements. The chairperson suggested that the SIP should require that parents spend at least one-half day per year in their children's classrooms. The principal said she thought that this was a good idea and that she would list that suggestion in the parent handbook to be passed out on parent contract day in the fall. The chairperson said that this would increase parent participation.

We also observed an open forum at a high school meeting in which the LSC sought input from the school community on the school improvement plan. There were about 60 people in the audience at this meeting. The chairperson of the school improvement committee, a community member, gave a presentation on the contents of the school improvement plan. After her presentation, the LSC had the audience members break into four smaller discussion groups with LSC members. Three parent members and a teacher member of the LSC were discussion leaders. Most of the audience members chose to stay and participate in these sessions. Afterwards the discussion leaders reviewed the comments.

Three of the twelve schools discussed issues related to the Overcrowding subcategory, with the greatest number of topics (9) concentrated at one school where overcrowding was a major problem. This council discussed locating additional classroom space in nearby churches, surveying parents about the best location for new space, discussing the program to be established at the new space, and discussing whether the new space should be a separate school or a branch school. Two other schools discussed problems associated with out of area attendance students who were using space needed by attendance area students. (See pages 34-41 for a detailed description of how one council grappled with overcrowding over a series of meetings.)

#### LSC Organizational Topics

The second most frequently discussed category of LSC topics dealt with the business of running the council itself. We have two separate sub-categories in this area: procedures and training. (See Table 4.) LSC procedures were more frequently discussed than topics

in any other sub-category. About 20 percent of all topics considered by councils dealt with LSC procedures.

Because we did not begin our systematic observations of council meetings until winter, we did not observe earlier meetings when the LSCs transacted considerable procedural business including the election of officers and the development of committees. However, the councils still needed to transact procedural business throughout the year. Perhaps because of the time we started our observations, we frequently observed business related to developing, discussing and approving by-laws (12 occurrences). We observed five topics related to committee structure and membership and three topics related to election of officers. Scheduling and rescheduling meetings occurred eight times.

The councils discussed the absence of members eight times and filling vacancies eight times. Together, these related topics were the most prevalent issues in this sub-category. (The 16 topics together account for 3.4 percent for all topics that we observed.) Absence of members was clearly an important issue for several of these councils. They grappled with how to induce some members to attend more often or to resign. Two councils formally requested that one or more members resign because they wanted to replace non-performing members. The two schools wrote to non-attending members and included a prepared letter of resignation and a stamped envelope addressed to the school.

One of these schools raised the issue of absence of council members at almost every meeting in order to have their discussions formally recorded in their minutes. At this school's April council meeting, absence of members was the first major order of business. Following the March meeting, the council had written to one community member and one parent member to ask them to attend meetings more regularly. The council members present discussed whether they could legally ask members to resign and one member volunteered to call a lawyers' advisory group for assistance. Another member suggested that neighbors of the non-attending community member approach him and ask him to fulfill his responsibilities to the council or to resign from it.

At the May meeting, the principal reported that he could not reach the community member after several phone calls and visits to his house. A council member introduced a motion to indicate that the council supported amending the school reform legislation to make it easier to remove non-attending LSC members. This motion was unanimously passed. At the June meeting the council again discussed the absence of the community member and speculated about the man's reasons for not attending. The members present felt that he had much to contribute to the council and wished that he would attend meetings. However, they unanimously passed a resolution requesting the principal to write to the community member and one non-attending parent member asking them to resign.

Other LSC Procedural issues of about equal frequency included district council business and discussion and approval of the Chicago Panel request to conduct this study. (We were present at five meetings when this request came to a vote.) Less frequent issues included discussing and determining procedures for public participation during meetings and the formats for agendas and minutes.

Three separate sensitive topics have been included in this procedural category. The first dealt with whether or not the LSC would censure a non-LSC teacher for an alleged racial slur. Another dealt with the eligibility of a council member and the third dealt with how much involvement the LSC should have with an individual student issue.

LSC training is the second subcategory in this area. We observed 38 instances when LSCs discussed training specifically designed for LSCs. They discussed (or heard reports on) several different types of training, including lump sum budgeting, boardmanship, principal evaluation and selection, strategic planning, and school improvement planning.

Some schools also planned training retreats. At a February meeting of one of the elementary schools, the LSC discussed their retreat. The agenda included a team building exercise, a talk about needs assessment, and discussion on budgeting and school improvement planning. Two of the three organizations that the LSC had wanted to use for their retreat would not be available. Some council members wanted to cancel the retreat because of this, but the LSC decided to go ahead as planned and use internal resources to cover the training areas. They decided budgeting and school improvement planning would be covered by the council chair and the principal respectively.

#### Building, Safety and Security

The third general area of topics contains two subcategories relating to school safety, buildings and security. We have labelled the subcategories as Security, Safety and Discipline and School Infrastructure. Security, Safety and Discipline contains 46 topics or 10.0 percent of all topics discussed by LSCs. Of the 46 topics, nine involved discussing and planning a school dress code (in four schools). Most of the discussion about dress codes specifically referred to gang issues (avoiding problems about gang colors and symbols, etc.). In a few instances, councils developed dress codes without any reference to gangs.

The second most prevalent topic in this subcategory includes explicit discussion of gang problems (in addition to the gang related discussions about dress codes). These took place in two schools. Two other schools discussed developing parent patrols to improve safety. One school discussed developing an in-school suspension and detention center several different times. In three meetings at different schools, a police officer or representative attended to present information and participate in discussions about crime and gang prevention. Other topics in this subcategory included discussion about after school fighting, fighting on the school bus, vandalism, and attendance and tardy policies.

One security topic consisted of a presentation made to an elementary school by a staff member of a city government agency that works to curtail youth gangs and violence. The presenter explained the programs and services available to LSCs and asked the LSC to consider having these programs at the school. He passed out information on the "safe school zone" law which has special provisions for the prosecution of crimes committed within close proximity of a school. The principal, chair and one other parent asked a few questions and mentioned some problems with fighting and other violence in the school and surrounding area. Other than these few questions and comments, the LSC did not discuss the issue much. After the presentation and comments, the LSC went on to the next topic.

One of the high schools in our study discussed a uniform dress code at several of its meetings. One of these discussions was very heated and had high participation. Five LSC members, four students and three adults in the 30 member audience participated. At this school, the LSC had decided to implement a dress code the following school year. It was reported that in reaction to the dress code policy, students had attempted to stage a sit-in and had threatened a walk-out the following day. It was also reported that the students at the school had developed a survey for students about the dress code. Students in the audience at this meeting requested that the LSC hold a meeting with student representatives to discuss the dress code policy. A parent in the audience said that he would sue the LSC for violating his daughter's civil rights by imposing a uniform dress code. Another parent, who was a police officer, asked the first parent whom he would sue if his daughter were killed because of the colors she was wearing. A student then said that the uniforms themselves could make students at the school targets for people who were not from the school. Another student suggested that the LSC meet with the entire student body. The chairperson responded that the LSC would be happy to meet with the students. The LSC voted to hold a meeting with some representatives of the student body and then afterwards to meet with the entire student body. The parent who was a police officer then made an emotional plea for uniforms. A teacher in the audience responded that 20 years ago, when she was a student, she was assaulted because she was wearing a school uniform.

The subcategory of topics on School Infrastructure contains 16 topics or 3.5 percent of the total. Almost half of these topics occurred in one school where the LSC felt that the building needed major rehabilitation. Other topics included the need for a kitchen at one school, whether to build a playlot (the LSC decided not to), and rehabilitation at a high school. One school had a problem identification session with the school engineer. The engineer first explained some of the problems he had identified having to do with clocks, the intercom system and washrooms. A teacher member then outlined some teacher complaints such as the heating in the lunch room, lack of toilet tissue and paper toweling in the teachers lounge, and the daily cleaning needs of the office and classrooms. The LSC chairperson discussed the gang graffiti problem. Another parent complained about a strong odor in a bathroom. After these complaints had been made, the LSC chairperson asked that there be a monthly list of comments and complaints for the engineer. The engineer then cited examples of differences in delivery of materials between schools, for example a nearby magnet school versus this school. A parent member suggested forming a committee to facilitate getting things accomplished in the school building. The principal supported this idea and thought that this might help get things done instead of just discussed.

### Finance

We classified finance issues into two subcategories: Budgeting and School Fund Raising. Budgeting topics were those that dealt with official school budgeting of funds made available through the school board, including regular board funds and special project funds. We observed 34 separate Budgeting topics, accounting for 7.4 percent of all topics. These topics were very diverse. Fourteen topics were related to very specific expenditures or transfers of funds. These include transferring bilingual funds from one budget line to another, approving expenditure of bilingual funds on instructional materials, using State Chapter One funds for a drama program, hiring an assistant principal with State Chapter

One funds, approving expenditure of special education funds, and similar specific items. Other issues in this subcategory include approving the school's CANAL budget and discussing staff cuts made by the central administration. Only five topics dealt with larger budgetary issues, like procedures for lump sum budgeting, the relationship between the school improvement plan and the school budget, and approving the school budget. The number of more general budget topics may be so low because some schools discussed lump sum budgeting in committee meetings and special meetings that we were not able to attend.

One example of a specific budget topic occurred at a high school meeting. The LSC discussed finances during a report by its representative to the district council. During the report, a teacher member on the LSC asked the district representative to inform the district superintendent that the school had never received money that had been allocated for furniture and equipment. The teacher said that the money was allocated but was not in the budget and asked, "Where did the money go?" The principal stated that there was \$400,000 or \$500,000 allocated, but that the school never received the money.

Of the 17 topics classified as School Fund Raising, four dealt with developing proposals for outside funding (from major foundations and from a school support organization). All of the other topics were concerned with local school fund raising activities like candy sales.

At an elementary school council meeting, the LSC discussed holding a book fair near the end of the school year to raise money for the school. The chairperson asked the librarian to give a brief description of the book fair program. The librarian explained to the LSC that the book fair would not disrupt library services to the children because it would take place during inventory, not when classes were being held in the library. The principal said that he believed the book fair would disrupt other classroom activities because teachers would have to shorten their classroom teaching time to bring students to the book fair. A parent member said that she felt that the book fair was an important activity for the students to participate in and that it encouraged reading. After more discussion and comments from the LSC and members of the audience, the LSC voted to have a school book fair. The vote in favor of the book fair was six to one with only the principal voting in opposition.

At another elementary school, members of the LSC and other parents conducted a rummage sale to raise funds for the school. The LSC discussed opening a bank account and registering members to sign checks from this account. The funds from this and similar events were not being deposited in the school account.

### Personnel

The Personnel area contains two subcategories. The first is Principal Selection and Contract and the second is Other Personnel. Principal Selection and Contract topics deal exclusively with hiring, evaluating, and negotiating a contract with the principal. Over half of all personnel issues that we observed discussed by LSCs this year had to do with principal evaluation and contract. We observed 28 instances of LSCs discussing or reporting on

principal selection issues. Although only seven of the 12 schools in this study selected or retained a principal this year (three of them did so before we began the study), two other schools also discussed issues in this subcategory.

Four of the elementary schools and three of the high schools that we observed discussed principal evaluation and contract issues in meetings that we attended. The tone of these discussions was extremely diverse. One school that had already offered its principal a contract had an informal discussion about the logistics of completing the contract. The discussion was not on the agenda and was very brief. The discussion began when one of the parent members asked when the contract had to be signed. Another council member told him that contracts were due on April 15, 1990. The LSC then decided that the contract would be signed the following week at a meeting of the council shortly after this deadline. The secretary asked the council if they wanted to add criteria to the contract. Council members said that they did not want to add criteria and amiably said that the principal already worked hard enough. The secretary then noted that the contract needed to be typed and signed.

At another school, there was conflict among council members on the process of offering the principal a contract. This school had established a committee to develop a process to review the principal's performance and to develop interview questions. The LSC held a meeting shortly before the February 28, 1990 deadline that the Board of Education had given for LSCs to decide whether they would offer their current principals contracts. At this meeting, the vote on the principal contract was not on the agenda, but a report from the principal review committee was. This meeting had approximately 30 people in the audience, more people than at any of the other meetings we had observed at this school. Many of the audience members were teachers.

The committee to review the principal gave a report on its work. The chairman of this committee, a community member, reported that the committee had reviewed the subdistrict superintendent's evaluation of the principal and that this review would generate some of the questions that the LSC would ask the principal in his interview. He also reported that the committee had looked at comments from the parents concerning principal retention and had studied documents that gave suggestions on how to review the principal. The committee agreed that each member would select questions for the interview of the principal to bring to the following meeting. The chair of the committee also agreed to have the questions presented to the principal before the interview. The members of the committee agreed that an interview of the principal was the next step. A parent member complained that she had not received notice of one of the meetings of the committee and that she felt that teacher's comments were not reviewed by the committee. The committee chair responded that he had tried to contact her about this meeting. He also said that Board of Education guidelines did not require teacher input into the principal review process, that it only suggested that LSCs review the subdistrict superintendent's evaluation of the principal and community input. Following this, the chairman of the principal review committee said that the LSC would not be able to decide on the principal contract by February 28th because the process was not complete. In response, the chairman of the LSC said that he wanted the LSC to vote at the meeting that night because he thought that the LSC stood a chance of losing the principal to another school if it waited until after the

deadline. At this point, the principal review committee chair said that he was hearing negative comments from the audience every time his name came up. He then said that he objected to voting on the principal contract right away because a principal review process had been put into place that should not be changed. A parent member responded that the time line for the LSC was tight. The committee chair said that he felt like he was receiving mixed signals from the LSC chair. Someone in the audience said that the committee chair had an "ego problem." The committee chair said that he would ask to have the room cleared if there was another outburst. The committee chair then said that the LSC chair had agreed with him that the interview could be done at the convenience of the principal. He said that his secretary was typing the questions for the interview and that he did not have the questions with him. A parent member moved that the LSC go into closed session and interview the principal and afterwards reopen the meeting to vote. The LSC chair said that he had questions with him from the Board of Education's Law Department that the LSC could use to interview the principal right away. The motion carried with six members in favor, two opposed, and the principal abstaining. The two members who opposed the motion were the community member who was chair of the principal review committee and a teacher member who was also on the committee. These two people then left the meeting and the other seven members went into closed session. Upon returning to open session, the council voted to retain the principal with six council members voting in favor and the principal abstaining. One of the members voting in favor of offering the principal a contract was a new member who was attending his first meeting.

At the next meeting of this LSC, a community member who had been absent from the previous meeting said that he had been led to believe that action on the principal contract would not be taken prior to February 28th. He felt that he should have been notified that this matter was going to be voted on and that he felt the decision was rushed. He moved that the LSC reconsider the principal selection vote but the motion was ruled out of order.

The second Personnel subcategory, Other Personnel, contains 22 topics. Often, Other Personnel topics dealt with staffing of the school in general. Several schools discussed these general staff issues which include discussions about the types of staff needed, problems with obtaining funds to hire needed staff, and where staff cuts should be made. Though most of the schools we observed left the actual hiring of staff to the principal, one LSC took a very active role in assisting the principal interview and select the staff for the school. At the meetings we observed, this LSC went into closed session three times to discuss personnel issues. According to the minutes of this school, at least one of these closed sessions was to discuss candidates for computer lab teachers and another one was to discuss extending full-time basis substitute status to a teacher. One of the personnel topics discussed in open meeting was based on the principal's report that the budget called for a child welfare attendant to be hired. The principal, the chair and two other parents discussed this issue. The LSC voted to talk with three or four people with whom the principal had discussed the opening to see if any of these people were interested in applying. The LSC also set up a committee of four parent members to help the principal conduct interviews.

## Parent and Community Involvement

The LSCs considered 20 topics related to parent and community involvement during our observations. These topics included discussions about increasing parent involvement in the schools, reports from parent clubs and volunteer programs. Other issues in this category include involving parents in fund raising activities, and conducting public relations activities to improve parent and community perceptions of the school.

Reports from parent clubs often consisted of announcements and reports of activities. For example, one parent club for the Child Parent Center at one of the schools reported on the number of active members in the club, workshops being held, achievement awards, cards for senior citizens in a nursing home, lead poison testing, LSC approval of parent club by-laws, the book fair, fingerprinting, a teacher appreciation luncheon and an art fair.

A discussion at another school attempted to address the causes of low parent involvement in the school. At this meeting there were five adults in the audience. The principal asked the audience members their opinion about why there was so little parent participation. There was no response from the audience. The chairperson of the LSC said that he did not think that parents would want to come to meetings but that they would participate in school activities. The chair also said that he thought it was more important for parents to participate in school programs or volunteer their services than it was for them to attend meetings.

Some of the discussions were about how to get more parents and community members involved. For example, in an August 1990 meeting at one of the high schools, a community member on the LSC reported that the LSC had called all the people who ran for the LSC but were not elected to see if they would like to get involved in the school.

## Other Topics

The other topics category contains 22 topics. Several of these dealt with programs in a park near one of the schools. Others included summer jobs for high school students, district office staff, athletic contracts, and a school improvement cluster.

## School-to-School Variability in Meeting Content

The preceding descriptions of LSC meeting content aggregated all 466 observed topics from 12 schools to present overall percentages. However, schools differed from each other in what topics they considered in their LSC meetings. For example, overall, 28.6 percent of the topics from all of the schools concerned the broad area of school program topics (including curriculum and instruction, school improvement planning, school administration, and overcrowding). At three schools, school program issues constituted about half of the topics that these LSCs considered. At another six schools they were hardly discussed with fewer than 20 percent of their topics concerning school program issues. There is similar variability among schools in the percent of LSC topics dealing with LSC procedures and LSC training. For one school, over 70 percent of the LSC topics dealt with procedural issues. In another six LSCs, procedural issues accounted for less than 25 percent

of the topics that we observed. See Table 5 for the percent of topics in each broad category area for the twelve sample schools.

Table 5

| <i>Percent of LSC topics by category area and by school</i> |                       |                                 |                  |               |                              |                            |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| <i>School</i>                                               | <i>School program</i> | <i>LSC org &amp; procedures</i> | <i>Personnel</i> | <i>Budget</i> | <i>Building &amp; safety</i> | <i>Parent/comm involve</i> | <i>Other</i> |
| <i>A</i>                                                    | 31.0                  | 22.4                            | 5.2              | 12.1          | 12.1                         | 3.4                        | 15.5         |
| <i>B</i>                                                    | 12.5                  | 33.3                            | 8.3              | 25.0          | 20.8                         | 0.0                        | 0.0          |
| <i>C</i>                                                    | 16.4                  | 40.0                            | 14.5             | 14.5          | 12.7                         | 0.0                        | 0.0          |
| <i>D</i>                                                    | 42.6                  | 37.0                            | 7.4              | 3.7           | 1.9                          | 5.6                        | 1.9          |
| <i>E</i>                                                    | 16.7                  | 33.3                            | 0.0              | 8.3           | 25.0                         | 16.7                       | 0.0          |
| <i>F</i>                                                    | 10.5                  | 42.1                            | 10.5             | 5.3           | 15.8                         | 15.8                       | 0.0          |
| <i>G</i>                                                    | 22.2                  | 22.2                            | 33.3             | 17.8          | 4.4                          | 0.0                        | 0.0          |
| <i>H</i>                                                    | 17.5                  | 20.0                            | 0.0              | 12.5          | 35.0                         | 7.5                        | 7.5          |
| <i>W</i>                                                    | 14.3                  | 71.4                            | 0.0              | 7.1           | 7.1                          | 0.0                        | 0.0          |
| <i>X</i>                                                    | 48.1                  | 22.2                            | 3.7              | 11.1          | 14.8                         | 0.0                        | 0.0          |
| <i>Y</i>                                                    | 25.0                  | 14.3                            | 19.6             | 3.6           | 25.0                         | 1.8                        | 10.7         |
| <i>Z</i>                                                    | 49.2                  | 18.0                            | 6.6              | 11.5          | 1.6                          | 9.8                        | 3.3          |

In future reports we would like to determine whether LSCs discussed and resolved issues of importance to their schools and how closely the school's priority needs matched the councils' priorities. One way to do this is to examine the relationship between external evidence about these schools and compare that to the council proceedings. However, this initial report will not contain that type of analysis. We expect to include those in later reports. Ultimately, we expect that our reports will examine more intensively the relationship between council deliberations, implementation of new programs that result from these deliberations, and the success of those programs. However, those analyses are not appropriate until the councils are more established.

We have looked at the relationship between different internal factors about councils. For example, we examined the relationship between what topics the councils considered and the attendance of council members. Councils that had higher average attendance at the meetings we observed considered a greater percent of school program issues (curriculum and instruction, school improvement planning, school administration, and overcrowding) than councils with lower attendance. The school that dealt with the largest proportion of school program issues (49.2 percent of the topics at this school were related to school program) also had the highest attendance. The school that considered school program issues second most often (42.6 percent of their topics related to school program) had the

second highest attendance. Two out of the three councils that considered school program issues least also had among the three lowest council attendance rates. Statistically, the correlation between average attendance (excluding the student member in the high schools) and percent of all topics devoted to school program issues is 0.77 for these twelve councils.

There are several possible explanations for this trend. One of these is that council members are more likely to attend more meetings if they believe that the councils are dealing with the most crucial and relevant issues and are not overwhelmed with procedural matters. A second explanation is that councils where members are more able to attend meetings or are more diligent are more likely to find school program issues to be high priority. A third possibility is that a third, unknown variable (the educational or experience level of the council members, or the receptivity of the principal, for example) influences both attendance and the content of council meetings. Future reports will probe this area more deeply when we examine the relationship between council member background and turnover, attendance and participation.

There is also a correlation between attendance of council members and the percent of LSC organizational and procedural issues discussed. In councils with lower attendance, members more frequently discussed organizational and procedural topics than in councils with higher attendance. One important factor at play here has already been noted. A significant portion of LSC procedural topics included discussion of absent members and filling council vacancies. To some extent, procedural and organization issues may have detracted from school program issues in some schools.

#### Participation In Local School Council Meetings

This section of the report describes the participation of council members in council meetings. During our observations we recorded which members participated in each topic that came before the council. We defined participation to include making a report, asking a question, making a clarification or a comment, and becoming involved in a discussion. The participation counts are not weighted within topics, so that a council member who made several distinct comments about one topic was coded for only one participation. (Although we do not have precise data about the variability from one participation to another, it is clear that the range is great.)

We recorded a total of 1,447 "participations." For the 463 topics that we coded participation (because three topics were conducted in closed session we could not code participation), on the average, 3.13 council members participated in each topic. The average amount of participation differed from one topic to another. More people participated in discussions of Building, Security and Safety, while only two member were likely to talk when Parent and Community Involvement and Other issues were raised. On the one hand, this may be a valid indication of the relative level of importance, urgency or relevance to council members. On the other hand, it may only indicate the preliminary issues that councils perceived needed to be resolved before moving on to more important priorities.

Table 6

| <i>Average number of participants by topic category area</i> |                         |                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <i>Categories (in boldface) and subcategories</i>            | <i>Number of topics</i> | <i>Average # of LSC members participating</i> |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                 | <b>463</b>              | <b>3.1</b>                                    |
| <b>School Program Topics</b>                                 | <b>133</b>              | <b>3.2</b>                                    |
| Curriculum and Instruction                                   | 58                      | 3.1                                           |
| School Improvement Planning                                  | 29                      | 4.2                                           |
| School Administration                                        | 34                      | 2.2                                           |
| Overcrowding                                                 | 12                      | 4.3                                           |
| <b>LSC Organizational</b>                                    | <b>127</b>              | <b>3.1</b>                                    |
| LSC Procedures                                               | 89                      | 3.1                                           |
| LSC Training                                                 | 38                      | 3.0                                           |
| <b>Building, Security &amp; Safety</b>                       | <b>62</b>               | <b>3.6</b>                                    |
| School Infrastructure                                        | 16                      | 2.8                                           |
| Security, Safety & Discipline                                | 33                      | 3.8                                           |
| <b>Budget</b>                                                | <b>51</b>               | <b>3.0</b>                                    |
| Finance and Budgeting                                        | 34                      | 2.9                                           |
| School Fund Raising                                          | 17                      | 3.1                                           |
| <b>Personnel</b>                                             | <b>48</b>               | <b>3.4</b>                                    |
| Principal Selection & Contract                               | 28                      | 3.9                                           |
| Other Personnel                                              | 20                      | 2.6                                           |
| <b>Parent &amp; Community Involvement</b>                    | <b>20</b>               | <b>2.2</b>                                    |
| <b>Other</b>                                                 | <b>22</b>               | <b>2.2</b>                                    |
| Note: Three topics are not coded for participation.          |                         |                                               |

Building and safety concerns (see pages 9-10 for a review of the definitions of the topic categories) had the highest average number of members who participated, followed in order by Personnel, School Programs, LSC Organizational topics, Finance, Parent and Community Involvement, and Other topics. Except for Parent and Community Involvement

and Other topics, participation averaged about three or more council members<sup>6</sup> per topic. (See Table 6.)

More information is revealed when we inspect participation rates by topic sub-category. The most participation occurred when councils discussed Overcrowding, when an average of 4.3 council members participated (this is at least in part due to the fact that most discussion of overcrowding took place in one school with high council attendance and high overall participation). We observed the next most participation when councils discussed School Improvement Planning issues (4.2 members). The sub-categories with the next greatest amount of participation are Principal Selection and Contract (3.9 members) and Security, Safety and Discipline (3.8 members).

Participation drops somewhat from about four members for the four subcategories with the greatest participation to about three members for seven sub-categories. These are, in order: LSC Procedures (3.1 members), Curriculum and Instruction (3.1 members), School Fund Raising (3.1 members), LSC Training (3.0 members), Finance and Budgeting (2.9 members), School Infrastructure (2.8 members), and Other Personnel (2.6 members).

Council participation was lowest for School Administration (2.2 members), Parent and Community Involvement (2.2 members) and Other topics (2.2 members). There was relatively little participation in School Administration because these topics tended to be part of a formal principal's report and contained information about enrollment, dates for teacher appreciation days and school events and other such announcements.

More total council participation occurred when School Program issues were being discussed than on any other topic. In terms of actual total number of participations, 427 were in school program topics. LSC Organization and Procedures is second most frequent (390), followed in order by Building and Safety (225), Personnel (161), Finance (152), Parent and Community (47), and Other (45). To a large extent, the frequency of participations reflects the same order of the frequency that topics came up for discussion. (This information is contained in Table 9, which is discussed in subsequent paragraphs.)

Participation in council meetings varies by member and by school as well as by topic. This report examines participation by role on council, variation from one school to another, then, finally, participation by role on council in relation to topics.

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<sup>6</sup>We also recorded participation of guests but did not differentiate single from multiple guests for one topic. One or more guests participated 103 times. Their average participation was highest in Parent and Community topics, followed by Building & Safety, Personnel, Finance & Budget, and Other topics. Guest participation was least in School Program and LSC Procedures topics. Councils varied considerably in how guests could participate. Some councils only allowed guests to talk if they previously arranged to be on the agenda, other councils restricted them to regularly scheduled "public participation," others welcomed comments from guests at any time during the meetings.

Table 7

| <i>Participation of council members by role</i>                                                                   |                                     |                                                           |                             |                                              |                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                   | <i>Total possible participation</i> | <i>Total possible participation corrected for absence</i> | <i>Actual participation</i> | <i>Actual as a percent of total possible</i> | <i>Actual as a percent of corrected total possible</i> |
| <i>Chairperson (1)</i>                                                                                            | 463                                 | 406                                                       | 201                         | 43.4                                         | 49.5                                                   |
| <i>Principal (1)</i>                                                                                              | 463                                 | 452                                                       | 307                         | 66.3                                         | 67.9                                                   |
| <i>Other parents (5)</i>                                                                                          | 2,296                               | 1,461                                                     | 390                         | 17.0                                         | 26.7                                                   |
| <i>Teachers (2)</i>                                                                                               | 915                                 | 796                                                       | 289                         | 31.6                                         | 36.3                                                   |
| <i>Community (2)</i>                                                                                              | 920                                 | 665                                                       | 253                         | 27.5                                         | 38.0                                                   |
| <i>Student (1)</i>                                                                                                | 158                                 | 82                                                        | 7                           | 4.4                                          | 8.5                                                    |
| <i>All members</i>                                                                                                | 5,215                               | 3,862                                                     | 1,447                       | 27.7                                         | 37.5                                                   |
| Total possible participation is the number of topics multiplied by the number of members corrected for vacancies. |                                     |                                                           |                             |                                              |                                                        |

Principals participated in more discussions than any other council members. If they had attended all of their schools' LSC meetings, the principals in this sample could have participated in as many as 463 topics (the total number of topics for which we coded participation). The principals actually did participate in 307 of the 463 topics, a participation rate of 66.3 percent. Since the principals did not attend all of the meetings (as a group, the twelve principals missed two meetings), this participation rate can be adjusted or corrected for the missed meetings. During the meetings that the twelve did attend, the councils considered 452 topics. The adjusted (corrected for absence) participation rate for principals is 67.9 percent. Principals participated in about two-thirds of all topics discussed when they were present. (See Table 7.)

The LSC chairpersons had a somewhat lower participation rate than the principals. When present, chairpersons participated in about half of the topics. (Like principals, chairpersons also had high attendance rates.) They participated in a total of 201 topics, resulting in a rate of 43.4 percent of the total possible and 49.5 percent of the corrected total possible.

Council members within the same roles differ from one another in their frequency of participation. Some chairpersons participated more than other chairpersons, and some principals participated more than other principals, etc. In order to analyze this variation, we have looked at participation rates by role on the council for each school. Table 8 contains these participation rates unadjusted for council members' absence. The schools in this sample differ greatly from one another in how frequently different members of the council participated.

Principal participation in council meetings varied from a high of 96.3 percent at School X to a low of 37.5 percent in School Y. The principal of School X participated in 26 out of the 27 topics that we observed. This school considered a relatively high rate of School Program issues and no Parent and Community Involvement and Other issues (see Table 5). These are issues that are associated, respectively, with high and low principal participation (this area is investigated in greater depth subsequently). At School Y, the principal served in an interim capacity and was not selected for the permanent position. This council considered principal selection topics at their meetings. The interim principal did not participate in these discussions.

Table 8

| <i>Percent of participation of total possible (unadjusted for absence)<br/>by role on council and by school</i> |                  |                    |                      |                 |                              |                 |                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| <i>School</i>                                                                                                   | <i>Principal</i> | <i>Chairperson</i> | <i>Other parents</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Community<br/>members</i> | <i>Students</i> | <i>All<br/>members</i> |
| <i>A</i>                                                                                                        | 83.1             | 35.6               | 14.2                 | 37.3            | 17.8                         |                 | 27.3                   |
| <i>B</i>                                                                                                        | 70.8             | 91.7               | 15.0                 | 54.1            | 2.1                          |                 | 30.8                   |
| <i>C</i>                                                                                                        | 80.0             | 23.6               | 13.1                 | 38.2            | 54.8                         |                 | 31.7                   |
| <i>D</i>                                                                                                        | 58.5             | 37.7               | 19.6                 | 29.2            | 18.9                         |                 | 26.4                   |
| <i>E</i>                                                                                                        | 75.0             | 100.0              | 8.3                  | 70.8            | 5.6                          |                 | 34.9                   |
| <i>F</i>                                                                                                        | 68.4             | 10.5               | 7.4                  | 39.5            | 26.3                         |                 | 22.5                   |
| <i>G</i>                                                                                                        | 65.1             | 58.1               | 27.7                 | 30.2            | 20.9                         |                 | 33.3                   |
| <i>H</i>                                                                                                        | 55.0             | 67.5               | 19.5                 | 28.8            | 30.0                         |                 | 30.7                   |
| <i>W</i>                                                                                                        | 78.6             | 50.0               | 14.1                 | 50.0            | 39.3                         | 0.0             | 32.1                   |
| <i>X</i>                                                                                                        | 96.3             | 29.6               | 3.7                  | 25.9            | 25.9                         | 3.7             | 21.0                   |
| <i>Y</i>                                                                                                        | 37.5             | 37.5               | 16.8                 | 15.2            | 33.9                         | 0.0             | 21.4                   |
| <i>Z</i>                                                                                                        | 59.0             | 37.7               | 24.3                 | 21.3            | 31.1                         | 9.8             | 27.7                   |
| <i>ALL</i>                                                                                                      | 66.3             | 43.4               | 17.0                 | 31.6            | 27.5                         | 4.4             | 27.7                   |

Participation of chairpersons varied even more, from a high of 100 percent at School E to a low of 10.5 percent at School F. The chairperson at School F missed two out of the six meetings we observed, which partially explains the low participation rate. If the two schools with the highest chairperson participation rates are excluded (Schools B and E) a negative relationship exists between principal and chairperson participation rates. With the exceptions noted, high principal participation is often associated with lower chairperson participation and similarly, low principal participation is associated with higher chairperson participation. Thus, if the principal speaks frequently, the chairperson is less likely to do so. If the chairperson speaks frequently, the principal is likely to speak less. But both participated frequently in Schools B and E.

Teacher members generally participated in 31 percent of the topics discussed, 36.3 when corrected for absences. Between schools, participation of teachers varied greatly. The average teacher member participated in 15.2 percent of the topics that School Y considered, whereas teacher members participated in 70.8 percent of School E's topics. (This does not control for attendance.) Interestingly, the schools with the highest percent of teacher participation (E, B, and W, all about 50 percent) were all schools with very little discussion of school programs. Those most focussed on schools programs (D, X, and Z) had minimal levels of teacher participation. (School Z had low teacher participation because one teacher was on leave of absence.)

Other council members had much lower participation rates. Parents (other than the chairperson) participated in only 17.0 percent of all the topics that these twelve sample schools considered in 74 meetings. Community members participated in 27.5 percent. Correcting the participation rates for absence indicates how much members participated when they were present. When present, community members participated in 38.0 percent of the topics possible, and other parents participated in only 26.7 percent. (For other parents and community members that have more than one single person on the council, these statistics represent the participation of an average member.) The participation of other parents was low across all schools, ranging from 3.7 percent in School X to 27.7 percent in School G. The range of community member participation was from 2.1 percent in School B to 39.3 percent in School W. Among all schools, School G stands out for quite balanced participation.

The range in participation should not necessarily be considered either good or bad. However, extremely low participation of any one group may indicate lack of involvement in school governance. Similarly, extremely high participation by one group may indicate dominance. Given the nature of the principal's and chairperson's roles on the councils, it is not surprising to find that they participate highly. It is probably important to view one member's participation in relation to other members' participation. For example, very high participation by the chairperson and the principal may be necessary and beneficial, but when coupled with low participation by other members it may indicate that the council isn't functioning as intended.

We also want to consider whether different council members participate differentially in different topic categories. Table 9 divides the total number of participations by each LSC member role and by category area. In terms of total participations, not accounting for the different number of parents, teachers, and principals on the councils, all six roles (principal, chairperson, other parents, teachers, community members, and student) participated most often in either School Program topics or LSC Organization and Procedure topics. All groups (except for the four high school student members who participated in only School Program and LSC Organization and Procedures topics) participated third most frequently in Building and Safety topics. Finance and Budget and Personnel are either fourth or fifth most frequent and Parent and Community and Other topics are sixth and seventh. This shows a remarkable degree of consistency of participation from one group of LSC members

Table 9

Table 9

| Total number and average percent of participations by LSC member role and topic category area |           |      |             |      |               |      |          |      |                   |      |          |      |             |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|-------------|------|---------------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|----------|------|-------------|------|
| Topic category                                                                                | Principal |      | Chairperson |      | Other parents |      | Teachers |      | Community members |      | Students |      | All members |      |
|                                                                                               | Tot       | %    | Tot         | %    | Tot           | %    | Tot      | %    | Tot               | %    | Tot      | %    | Tot         | %    |
| School Program (133)*                                                                         | 109       | 82.0 | 45          | 33.8 | 124           | 18.8 | 79       | 28.9 | 67                | 25.2 | 3        | 5.1  | 427         | 28.2 |
| LSC Org & Procedures (127)                                                                    | 74        | 58.3 | 65          | 51.2 | 92            | 14.6 | 84       | 33.6 | 71                | 28.3 | 4        | 11.4 | 390         | 27.5 |
| Building & Safety (62)                                                                        | 46        | 74.2 | 32          | 51.6 | 63            | 20.3 | 42       | 34.7 | 42                | 34.4 | 0        | 0.0  | 225         | 32.3 |
| Finance & Budget (51)                                                                         | 39        | 76.5 | 19          | 37.3 | 35            | 13.8 | 31       | 31.0 | 28                | 27.5 | 0        | 0.0  | 152         | 26.6 |
| Personnel (48)                                                                                | 25        | 52.1 | 24          | 50.0 | 50            | 21.4 | 37       | 38.9 | 25                | 26.0 | 0        | 0.0  | 161         | 30.0 |
| Parent & Community (20)                                                                       | 5         | 25.0 | 8           | 40.0 | 14            | 14.0 | 9        | 22.5 | 8                 | 20.5 | 0        | 0.0  | 47          | 20.8 |
| Other (22)                                                                                    | 9         | 40.9 | 8           | 36.4 | 12            | 10.9 | 7        | 15.9 | 12                | 27.3 | 0        | 0.0  | 45          | 18.0 |
| TOTAL TOPICS (463)                                                                            | 307       | 66.3 | 201         | 43.4 | 390           | 17.0 | 289      | 31.6 | 253               | 27.5 | 7        | 4.4  | 1447        | 27.7 |

\*Note: The number in parentheses shows the number of topics in each category area. The "Tot" column tells how many participations we observed by topic and council role. The "%" is the percent of times the average member (by role) participated in each topic.

actual number of times that each topic category area comes before the council or for the different number of members in each role (for example, the councils have only one principal and chairperson but five "other parents").

Controlling for these factors by examining the average number of individual participations by role on the council and by topic category area provides another view of differential participation. In addition to showing the total number of participations by council member role and topic category area, Table 9 contains the percent of participations. This statistic shows that the average participation of different council roles is different from one topic category to another. Principals were most likely to participate in School Program topics (participating in 82.0 percent of them), whereas the chairperson was most likely to participate in Building and Safety issues (participating in 51.6 percent), LSC Organizational topics (51.2 percent) and Personnel matters (50.0 percent). Other parents and teachers participated relatively most often (given the number of times the topic occurred) in Personnel issues (21.4 percent for other parents and 38.9 percent for teachers). Community members participated relatively most often in Building, Security and Safety topics (34.4 percent).

The principals' participation follows a pattern that is easy to understand, with School Program topics first, Finance second, Building, Security and Safety third, LSC Organizational topics fourth, Personnel fifth (since many of the personnel issues were about the principals, frequently they did not participate in those discussions), Other topics sixth, and Parent and Community Involvement seventh. In many respects, these findings suggest that the principals provided the councils with information that they did not have and that they needed. Of all the members of the council, we would expect the principal to know a great deal about School Program, Finance and Budget, and Building and Safety issues and to provide this information to the council. Often the principal's participation occurred during the principal's report, a regular item on most agendas.

The chairperson's participation is less variable from topic to topic than the principal's. The highest principal participation rate is 82.0 percent for School Program topics and the lowest is 25.0 percent for Parent and Community topics, whereas the chairperson's participation rate ranges from 51.6 percent for Building and Safety to 33.8 percent for School Program topics. This suggests that the chairperson participates more evenly. Rather than serving as a source of information or expertise the chair is more likely to be a facilitator. It is noteworthy that the chairperson participated least frequently in School Program issues where the principal was most likely to participate.

Other parents and teachers have similar relative rates (although other parents participated more in absolute terms than teachers did because of the greater number of other parents) from topic to topic. Both groups participated most in Personnel and second most in Building and Safety. Other parents were more apt to participate (in relation to their participation in other topics) in School Programs than were teachers.

Community members were most likely to participate in Building & Safety issues, followed by LSC Organization and Procedures issues. School Programs is the fifth most likely issue for community members to participate in.

Previously, we saw that total participations from topic to topic was relatively consistent from member role to member role. However, once the participations are adjusted for the frequency of topic and examined within roles, we find that members do participate differentially. For the principal and chairperson the relative participation patterns meet our expectations for what these two council members bring to the meetings. Other members appear to participate in relation to their interests.

These data and our observational notes suggest several important questions that should be pursued. Although this summary of participation indicates who participated in what topics, it does not touch on several important areas. One of these may be the role of the principal on the councils. In some instances, principals provided information about school programs, budgets, and staffing patterns to help the councils make informed decisions. Other principals appeared to have made decisions and then sought council approval for them. These issues need to be further defined and studied to see how they relate to the ultimate success or failure of councils to bring about school improvement.

Our observers noted a wide range of interactions among council members from cooperative and collaborative to hostile and insulting. Sometimes disagreement between LSC members on issues led to angry debates whereas at other times differing opinions led to productive discussion and resolution. At least one LSC was split by factionalism with school personnel on one side of many issues and other members on the other side. Another school achieved consensus on nearly all issues. We observed some shouting matches and we saw one council member leave the middle of a meeting angry and frustrated. On the other hand, many meetings were characterized by a sense of productivity and purpose. At some point, we would like to examine how LSC dynamics affect participation and decision making processes.

One final area related to participation of council members concerns the effectiveness of the chairpersons. They displayed a wide range in ability to keep council meetings efficient and productive. Some chairpersons played only a nominal role in actually running the meetings, deferring regularly to the principal or to other more dominant or experienced members. The chairperson's influence on council effectiveness should receive further attention. These and other issues should be examined to determine how they affect the quality and quantity of participation on the councils.

#### Relationship between Attendance and Participation

We've noted before that principals and chairpersons have high attendance rates and that they also have relatively high participation rates. Overall, there is a tendency for council members who attend more often to participate more when they are present. (The correlation between attendance and participation when present for all council members is 0.57.) At least part of this relationship is due to the fact that principals and chairpersons attend most council meetings and participate in them and that students attend fewer meetings and do not participate much when present.

The relationship between attendance and participation when present persists when we conduct a more refined analysis. Figure 2 displays the correlation ( $r = 0.46$ ) between

attendance and participation when present for other parents and community members of the councils. The scatterplot labels each parent with a "P" and each community member with a "C." It is quite clear from this analysis that attendance and participation go hand in hand both for other parents (excluding the chairperson) and community members. (The scatterplot also shows that there are exceptions. Note that there are three parents who attended all meetings but participated in fewer than 10 percent of the topics.) The correlation does not necessarily mean that better attendance makes for more participation. Attendance and participation may both be related to another factor responsible for both (for example these two may be influenced by how the council members perceive other members' attitudes toward the value of their contributions to council meetings). Council members who have missed meetings may be reluctant to participate when they are present. For the chairperson, principal and teacher council members there is little correlation between their attendance and their participation when present. This is primarily due to their high attendance.

Figure 2

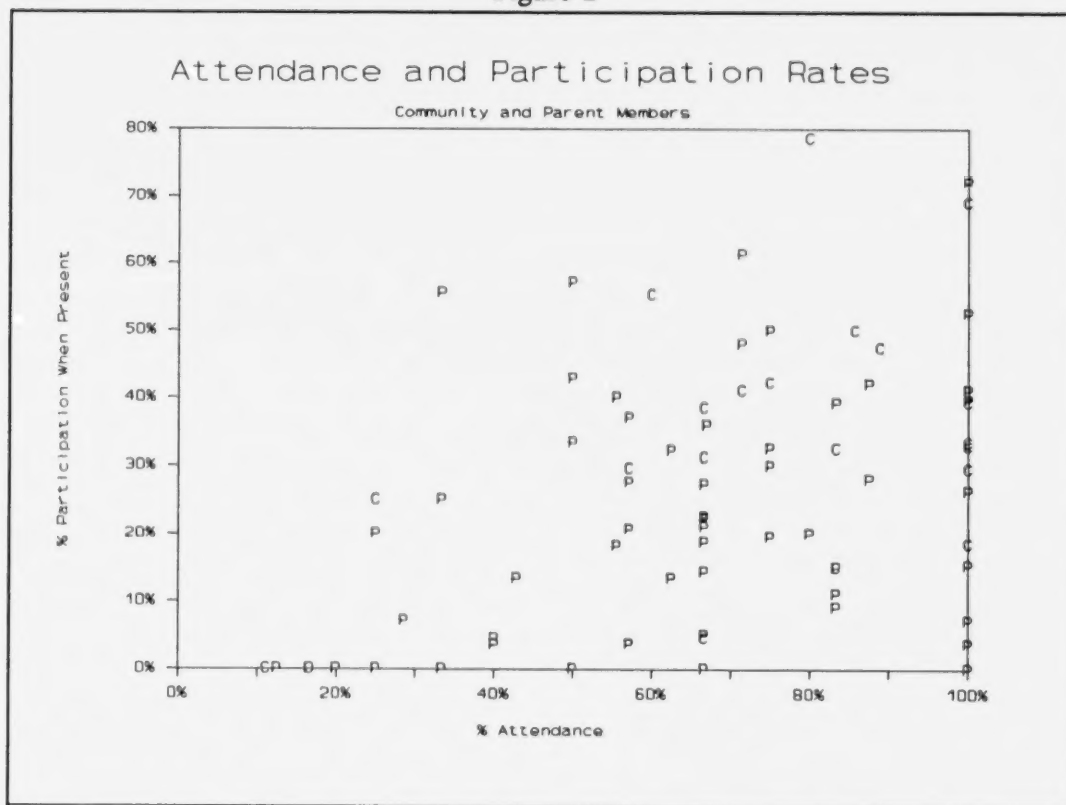


Figure 2 shows the relationship between attendance and participation when present for parents (excluding the chairperson) and community members. Parents are labelled "P" and community members "C."

## Council Voting

These councils voted on 134 topics during our observations. In terms of the number of votes, the greatest number (43) were in LSC Organization and Procedures topics, the second most (29) in School Program, followed in order by Finance and Budget (21), Personnel (18), Building and Safety (16), Parent and Community (4), and Other topics (3). Proportionately, Finance and Budget topics were most likely to be voted on (41.2 percent were). Personnel topics were second most likely to be voted on (36.0 percent), followed by LSC Organization and Procedures (33.6 percent), Building and Safety (25.8 percent), School Program (21.8 percent), Parent and Community (20.0 percent), and Other topics (13.6 percent).

Table 11

| <i>Number of topics voted on by category</i> |                          |                   |                   |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Topic category</i>                        | <i>Total # of topics</i> | <i># voted on</i> | <i>% voted on</i> |
| <i>School Program Topics</i>                 | 133                      | 29                | 21.8              |
| <i>LSC Organizational</i>                    | 128                      | 43                | 33.6              |
| <i>Building, Security &amp; Safety</i>       | 62                       | 16                | 25.8              |
| <i>Budget</i>                                | 51                       | 21                | 41.2              |
| <i>Personnel</i>                             | 50                       | 18                | 36.0              |
| <i>Parent &amp; Comm'ty Involvement</i>      | 20                       | 4                 | 20.0              |
| <i>Other</i>                                 | 22                       | 3                 | 13.6              |
| <i>TOTAL TOPICS</i>                          | 466                      | 134               | 28.8              |

In most cases, voting appeared to be the culmination of a decision making process that included prior discussion. Some of the votes followed a very brief discussion (for example, transferring funds from one budget line to another), whereas other followed protracted and involved discussions (approving the School Improvement Plan).

The councils used a range of procedures when they voted. Some councils did not require that a motion be seconded before voting. Voting procedures themselves also varied, including roll call votes, show of hands, and voice votes. Frequently it was difficult for the observer to tell how any one member voted on a particular issue. In a few instances, the observer could not tell that the voting actually occurred except that the chairperson indicated that the motion had passed. It seemed that in these few cases the councils had a strong enough sense of consensus from the discussion that they did not formally vote. Interestingly, few or no motions failed.

## Meeting Illustration - Overcrowding

Thus far this report has presented mostly quantitative descriptive information about LSC meetings with several brief illustrations. However, our data about the meetings, including detailed notes, are more informative than the summary information we have given so far. In order to give a more complete picture of how LSC meetings operated and what they accomplished, we conclude with an example of a topic discussion at one of our sample schools. The purpose of this section of the report is to provide a more in-depth look at the discussions of one LSC on a single topic over a series of meetings. These discussions occurred in a council characterized by high attendance, a high proportion of topics devoted to School Program issues, and high participation.

### Summary Information

Overcrowding is the central issue at one of the elementary schools we are observing. This school was labelled severely overcrowded by the Chicago Board of Education's *Space Utilization Report*.<sup>7</sup> During the year, the local school council discussions on overcrowding addressed two basic issues: the immediate problem of overcrowding and where to find space; and long term solutions for overcrowding. The LSC felt that it was in the best interest of the school to build an addition to the current school that would be staffed by the same principal and teachers. The Board of Education wanted to build an entirely new school to relieve overcrowding instead of constructing an addition. This is consistent with the Board's stated policy that additions would be constructed only in schools with fewer than 500 students.<sup>8</sup>

Overcrowding was the first topic of discussion on the agenda of this LSC for every single meeting we attended. At three of these meetings it was actually discussed two separate times -- once as part of the agenda item on overcrowding, then again later in the meeting. In addition to the six meetings we observed in the 1989-90 observation year, the council held two special LSC meetings that were almost solely devoted to overcrowding. Council members also met with members of the Chicago Board of Education, staff from various departments at the Board, the district superintendent, political figures and neighboring churches with space for lease.

At the meetings we attended, a relatively high number of council members participated in overcrowding discussions. On average about five LSC members participated each time overcrowding was discussed. However, this average hides a broad range in the level of participation. For example, at the first two meetings we observed, only one person, the chairman, participated. Both times he gave a report to the council about the status of leasing space from the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago. In contrast, at another meeting each of the eleven council members participated. In four out of the nine times that we observed the topic being discussed, 75 to 100 percent of the members present at the meeting

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<sup>7</sup>Chicago Board of Education, *Space Utilization Report*, March 1990.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid*, p. 12. Section on how the Board chooses between remedies for overcrowding.

participated in the topic discussion. At one of the meetings we observed, there was a good deal of participation from non-LSC members in the audience as well.

### Meeting Observations

The following notes from six meetings that we observed provide an idea of how the overcrowding discussions proceeded and who participated in them. These notes do not cover everything that the council did or said for two reasons. First, we did not begin observing this school until February of 1990 so we do not know what was discussed prior to that point. Also, because people often speak rapidly, we were not by able to record all discussions verbatim. Each observer had to make immediate decisions about which information was most important when a person was speaking quickly. This summary covers the field notes as completely as possible without revealing the identity of the school. The notes provide a picture of how one council handled a major problem.

#### *Regular Meeting of the LSC - February 1990*

*Participant: Chairperson*

The chairperson reported to the council about the status of a Catholic school from which the LSC had planned to lease space if it closed. The chairperson reported that plans to move classes to a new location would be put on hold until the Archdiocese made further decisions on school closings.

#### *Regular Meeting of the LSC - March 1990*

*Participant: Chairperson*

The chairperson reported on the status of leasing space.

#### *Regular Meeting of the LSC - April 1990*

*Participants: Chairperson, two other parent members, principal, both teacher members, one community member, people in the audience*

At this meeting overcrowding was discussed twice, first, under the agenda item "Overcrowding." The free-flowing discussion was lengthy and heated and had high participation from LSC members and audience members. The LSC allowed the audience to participate freely in the discussion.

The chairperson reported that he and the principal had met with the Board of Education realtor. The principal reported on the options that the Board of Education gave to the school to relieve overcrowding. These options included: 1) buying a Catholic school that the principal and the LSC felt was too far away; 2) building a new school near another existing school in the area, [the principal said that the site was too small and too far away]; 3) leasing space from the two churches that the LSC discussed in the February

meeting; 4) building a new school to relieve the overcrowding that would have a separate principal and LSC. The principal also stated that the new, permanent Board of Education might be more willing to listen to the school's demands than the Interim Board had been. (The Interim Board's term was originally to have ended in May of 1990 but it was not finally replaced until October 3, 1990.)

People in the audience said that the school should push now for what they wanted and not wait for a new board to be appointed. Someone in the audience said that the Catholic school (see option 1 above) was too far away. An audience member also mentioned a meeting at the Board of Education that she had attended. This person said the meeting was "useless" and was critical of the Superintendent.

The principal made a motion to set up another meeting with a local alderman, a local state senator, and the representative from the Board's Real Estate Department with whom they had been dealing. A community member suggested that the LSC needed to "funnel the anger" that they had been expressing into action and decide what they were going to do. A teacher suggested joining forces with other schools in the area that were also overcrowded. The community member who spoke earlier asked what the LSC would want from a meeting and suggested that the LSC needed to plan its direction. A parent in the audience said "We will picket [various politicians] if they don't listen to us!" Someone on the LSC then suggested that this parent be on a committee to fight for overcrowding solutions.

The principal suggested using report card pickup day as a time to distribute materials on overcrowding to the parents. Because of high parent turnout, the principal thought this was a good time to "get the troops riled up." A teacher member suggested that the LSC provide a letter for parents to sign when they picked up their child's report card. A parent member suggested that they also get the business community to sign a petition. The two teacher members and an audience member suggested taking letters door to door and to churches for people in the community to sign. Audience members suggested two things: 1) that return addresses not be required on the letters because people would be afraid to sign; and 2) that kids be involved in this. The principal responded that getting kids to write letters to the Mayor and the Board might be a good tactic, and would "break some hearts."

In general, the LSC and audience seemed willing to fight the Board to get what they wanted. A lot of people expressed frustration at the Board and at political figures. Also, the LSC and audience generated a lot of ideas about what they could or should do. However, even though some decisions appeared to be made, it was not clear to the observer whether they were final or would be followed through. The topic was concluded and the council went on to other agenda items.

### *Later in the Same Meeting*

*Participants: Principal, one teacher member, three parent members, one community member*

Later in the meeting, overcrowding was brought up a second time. The principal brought up the issue under "Old Business." All audience members (other than the Panel observer) had left, and the principal said that the LSC might be able to talk more freely since the audience was gone. She asked a community member about the status of leasing space from the church where he worked. The community member said that this issue was completely up in the air because the Board of Education had written a statement of intent for the space but that it was full of mistakes and had never been rewritten despite the community member's persistence. He reported that the church parishioners could not vote to approve renting space because the Board had not put anything in writing. The principal suggested that she and the community member meet with the person from the real estate department of the Board of Education. The principal felt that the solution for overcrowding in the fall of 1990 might involve leasing space from this church.

A teacher member suggested closing the preschool to open a room for new kindergarten students. The principal said that they could do this but that it would be unpopular. A parent member said that closed enrollment was an option but that they would not want to move children during the school year. The principal then expressed her feeling that there was no easy answer because the LSC was dealing with people. A parent member asked what else they could do. The principal responded that they could also disenroll children from out of the attendance area but that two council members had kids out of district. At this point, the community member returned the council to the issue of whether rooms would be available in his church. He said that the person at the real estate department never returns his phone calls, that the church will vote when they get something in writing and that though the parishioners won't give up because of it, he feels that the Board has "placed many hurdles" in the way of leasing this space.

### *Regular Meeting of the LSC - May 1990*

*Participants: All members of the council*

First the chairperson reported that the LSC had invited all the members of the Board of Education, Superintendent Kimbrough, the local alderman, state senator and state representative to a meeting that would be held to discuss overcrowding. The principal then asked for a poll on the issue from members of the council and said that everyone should give their opinion on what to do about overcrowding. The principal then went around the table, starting with a teacher. This teacher said that since the new school would have to be a separate school that it should be on the same property as the

current school building so that the LSC would have more input into how the school would be set up. There then followed a discussion about whether there would be enough space on the current building's lot for two schools, especially if the new school wanted to have outdoor recess. A parent member said that there should not be another school on the lot because it would cause "mass chaos" and because the parking situation was already bad. Another parent member said that it was hard for her to say what she preferred because her children were out of district so because of the parking problem she would say no to another school on the same lot but at the same time if it would mean that her children would have to attend another school if the building were not built on the lot, then she would want it built there. Another parent member cautioned that the neighborhood would continue to grow and that in three years, they would still have to put up a new school. He wanted to have the new school put on the lot and then if it became overcrowded, then the LSC could implement a controlled enrollment policy. The other teacher member said she still didn't know about two buildings on the lot. She wondered what would happen if in the future there were two opposing principals. There was a little more discussion about this issue, then a parent member said that the LSC needed to decide immediately what to do with the status of the school so parents of children in the school can make their decisions. This parent member said the school should control enrollment or maybe reduce to half-day kindergarten, even though the principal had fought for full day kindergarten at the school. She said this was her short term solution and that in terms of a new school, it should be built on the current school's lot. A community member then asked what the demographics looked like for future enrollment to which the principal replied that she didn't know because pre-school had no enrollment boundaries and because there wasn't enough pre-registration. A parent said she had called the central Board's Department of Equal Educational Opportunity Programs to ask about controlled enrollment and was told that kindergarten students were exempt from a controlled enrollment policy and that the school could not selectively disenroll students with discipline problems. The principal then told the LSC that the school enrolled about 15 to 20 new students every month and that some students left every month. She said that if the school does not accept any new kids after September then enrollment would decrease throughout the year.

The principal then talked about the possibility of building a Child Parent Center (CPC) if the Board would allow it. A CPC would serve three year olds through first grade and would feed into the school. The principal said that CPCs do not have separate principals. A parent asked about double-shift schools and the principal said that it was not possible to do that.

A community member asked the other LSC members, "Do we accept what the Board is saying?" There was some discussion about whether the Board might yield to the LSC. The community member said that the woman from the Board's real estate office presented the Interim Board as unyielding.

He thought that taking on the Board would be an enormous time commitment. He said he was not confident that the LSC could harness all the energy. A parent then discussed whether the LSC could override the Board's decision. This parent member said that a lawyer for a school reform organization said that the LSC couldn't override the decision but could adopt a resolution to the Board stating all that they had gone through, send the resolution to a long list of people and keep the pressure on. Then there was some more discussion about whether they had to listen to the Interim Board or whether they should try to take this issue to the new board once it was appointed.

A community member said he liked the teacher's idea about building a CPC. The other community member said she felt like there shouldn't be a new school on the block because it would cause more traffic. A parent member said that if a school is built elsewhere that in 5 or 6 years they will have to build a new school on this lot anyway and that then they might not have input into the new school. The principal then asked the council if they should explore the CPC option. She said that the LSC has not come to closure on this issue and that they have to decide. She expressed her opinion that it might be crowded with another school on the site and that she wanted to keep the school as one school but she didn't know if this was best for the school. She said that maybe the LSC should request that pre-school and Head Start be limited to neighborhood kids. She also said "It would tear my heart out if we gave up full-day kindergarten" because she had to fight to get it and the school would probably never get the special funds again. She also said controlled enrollment wouldn't be a bad solution since the school does transfer a lot of kids out. A parent then said that he didn't think the LSC should make decisions without consulting parents. He suggested a referendum or an opinion survey of all parents. The chair expressed his opinion that he could see the point about possible friction between two schools but that they should see if it could work here. He was worried about kids getting injured at another site. He said that they should definitely look into the CPC option. There was more discussion about other possible options and then the topic was closed.

*Regular Meeting of the LSC - June 1990*

*Participants: Chairperson, two other parent members, principal, people in the audience*

As part of the overcrowding agenda item there was a discussion about busing students to available space in a nearby Catholic school. The discussion involved which grades would be moved, where students would be picked up, etc. The LSC voted unanimously to use this Catholic school to relieve overcrowding. The LSC decided to meet with parents at the close-of-school party to explain and solicit opinions about the plan to move classes to the Catholic school. Later in the meeting overcrowding was discussed again as

an agenda item regarding the survey to parents about overcrowding. The LSC began with a discussion of the purpose of the survey. The principal said that the purpose of the survey was to find out the parents' preference on where the new school building should be located. Parents in the audience asked who would make the final decision regarding the site. The principal said that according to the Board, the LSC could make that determination. The LSC said that they decided that they want an early childhood center because they can keep the same principal and same staff. This would not happen if they got a whole new school.

#### *Regular Meeting of the LSC - July 1990*

*Participants: Principal, one teacher member, two parent members, two community members and the school's assistant principal*

The Principal talked about attempts to lease space from the Catholic school that the LSC had voted to use. She noted that their school was about 14 classrooms short of space. The principal then noted other options: 1) busing kids to a different Catholic school that was farther away; 2) year round school; 3) two shift school. The principal did not think that any of these options were feasible but she thought they might get parents riled enough to put pressure on the Board of Education about the overcrowding situation. The principal also said that redistricting and closed enrollment might also solve overcrowding problems. There was some discussion about the redistricting idea, but the discussion primarily focused on the possibility of renting the Catholic school that the LSC had selected. One parent member noted that she thought that this church did not want to rent space to the school because some people have a negative image of the school. A community member moved that a committee speak to the pastor of the church. The motion was seconded and seemed to be informally accepted (though no vote was actually taken). Later on in the meeting, during the principal's report, the discussion turned once again to the overcrowding issue. The principal said that the school was desperate for space. A community member mentioned that his church had 3 rooms available. The principal stated that she was even thinking about dividing the gym up into classrooms.

#### Overcrowding Epilogue

In addition to the meetings we observed, the local school council held two special meetings solely devoted to overcrowding, one near the end of the 1989-90 school year and another in August before the opening of school for 1990-91. The minutes of the August meeting state that "Much frustration was felt by the Council members with the Board and various department heads as to the lack of communication, lack of information, long delays with responses, etc. It was strongly felt the Council had made no progress in its many, many months of struggling to reach some solution on overcrowding, and that to date, we had an even higher enrollment number and this still climbing."

As of the beginning of the 1990-91 school year, the school had been unable to secure rental space and was forced to create makeshift classrooms in the gym and in one of the side hallways. They had also decided to have an early childhood education center built on the school site. However, this school would not be an addition but would have a separate principal and local school council, against the wishes of the existing local school council.

We chose this illustration of local school council operations for several reasons. The issue was very important to this LSC and the members participated actively in discussions. This council also worked very cooperatively and with a great deal of consensus. They agreed that what they wanted was to build an addition to the school, rather than build a new school. The LSC persisted in seeking alternatives to the Board of Education's decision to build a separate school.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This report describes 74 local school council meetings in twelve schools during the second half of the school year. Although we do not want to generalize these findings to all schools, we think that they provide some useful and exciting clues about council procedures and processes. Also, we think that councils can use this report to help them consider their own effectiveness and to suggest strategies for change or improvement.

Although we have carefully avoided using the observations in this first-year report to evaluate the success of local school councils, certain themes have emerged from our data relating to attendance of members, content of meetings, and council member participation. First, although attendance was problematic in some of the sample schools, few councils were severely hampered by poor attendance. Several of the councils had excellent attendance. In LSCs with lower attendance, not all members had low attendance. Rather, these councils tended to have a core of half or more of their members who attended 75 percent or more of their meetings and a core of three or more members who were chronically absent. Parents (except for the chairperson) and community members were more likely to be absent than other members. As we continue this research, we will try to determine more about why some councils have high attendance while others do not and why certain members attend frequently while others attend rarely.

Second, as a group, these councils discussed many educational and "schooling" issues that appear to be related to the goals of the Chicago School Reform Act. Some schools spent much time grappling with problems whose resolution would lead to school improvement. In contrast, a few councils seemed preoccupied by procedural issues that appear to have little direct relationship to school improvement. This preoccupation with LSC procedures prevented them from discussing pertinent issues related to school improvement. We are very interested in researching the relationship between the content of council meetings and actual changes that occur in the schools resulting from council decisions.

Third, council members participated in council discussions in varying degrees. Our illustrations of meetings suggest that when more council members participate in a discussion, more information and alternative viewpoints are made known. Participation was highest for the most pressing issues. Some important topics, including Curriculum and Instruction, had only average participation. Principals and chairpersons participated most often and in ways that suggested that the principal served as information provider and that the chairperson served as facilitator. Some parents, especially on a few councils, had extremely low participation, which coupled with lower attendance suggested that they made few contributions to the councils. We are extremely interested in following participation, learning how it affects long-term outcomes of councils, and learning how councils can influence the participation of their members.

Our subsequent reporting will use this information as a baseline to see how councils develop during the second year of school reform. We will examine a number of questions including: Will attendance improve? Will non-attending members leave the councils and

be replaced with more active members? How will the second elected councils in 1991 be different from the first councils? Our future reports will compare council procedures in later years to this first year to answer these questions.

In addition to these questions about basic local school council operations, we will also ask more "Why" questions. That is, we will study why different patterns of attendance, participation, and topics of discussion emerge in different councils and among council members within different roles. Some of the questions we will study are: Why do some council members attend and participate infrequently? Does a council member's background (previous involvement in the school, education and occupation) affect attendance and participation? Do some council members feel uncomfortable participating? Why do some councils discuss and get more heavily involved in school issues while other councils discuss these issues rarely or do not participate when the principal reports on these issues? How critical a part does the principal play in the ultimate success or failure of the LSC to function as intended by the school reform legislation? We will also examine the changing role of the principal. How do some principals successfully alter their leadership styles to adapt to school reform while others do not?

We hope that councils themselves can benefit from our description of LSC attendance, content of meetings, and participation of members. Ideally, we would like to think that council members can use this report in their own self-evaluation, self-analysis or self-reflection. Further, this report may help councils answer questions like: Do their councils consider issues that are important to their school? Do all members of the council contribute to discussions and decision making? If not, what are the impediments and how can they be overcome? Does their council need assistance or further training? In spite of the time demands (and the limited time available to principals, staff and council members), we think that this sort of self-analysis may have long-term positive effects for the councils and their schools.

## VII. APPENDIX

### Identifying schools

Our plan for monitoring LSC operations called for an intensive study of 16 schools--twelve elementary and four high schools. Using a random sample stratified by racial composition and geographic location in the city, we identified 48 schools as possible participants--three sets of sixteen schools meeting the sampling requirements. We telephoned schools in early December 1989 to make an appointment with the principal and LSC chairperson to discuss participation in this study. These initial meetings required considerable follow-up, usually between three and five additional visits to LSC, Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) and faculty meetings to describe the purpose of our study.

By March 1990, after we had discussed this study with eighteen schools, a total of twelve had formally agreed to participate. At that time we decided to concentrate our efforts on studying these twelve schools delaying until the following year securing the participation of additional schools. The process of securing schools' participation proved more difficult and time consuming than we had expected. A separate report, *Securing the Participation of Schools for an In-depth Observational Study*<sup>9</sup>, describes both this process and some initial findings about LSC decision making. Council members and others in the school community expressed several concerns about participating in this study, including wariness about eventual classroom observations, about additional paperwork that might be involved, and of suspicions of outside organizations. In our analysis of which schools agreed to participate we found that those with principals initially supportive of the study were more likely to participate.

### Characteristics of participating elementary schools

The schools in this study were selected to be representative of the Chicago Public Schools in terms of racial composition and geographic location. Because we did not obtain our complete elementary school sample during the first year the participating schools differ in the aggregate slightly from schools citywide. The sample elementary schools are slightly larger than the average Chicago elementary school. The elementary sample has proportionately fewer White and Black students than does the system as a whole. Correspondingly, there are proportionately somewhat more Asian and Hispanic students in these eight sample schools than in the entire system. These schools have a slightly higher percent of students who are eligible for free or reduced cost lunch (low income). One of the elementary schools participates in the Chicago Board of Education's Project Creating a New Approach to Learning (CANAL).

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<sup>9</sup>This report is available from the Chicago Panel on request.

### Characteristics of participating high schools

The high schools in the sample more closely match the citywide aggregate. The sample schools are slightly smaller than average, and they have somewhat fewer black students and more Hispanic students. Otherwise they appear highly representative of all high schools. One high school is a Project CANAL school. Table 12 contains aggregate statistics for the twelve sample schools with citywide statistics for comparison.

Table 12

| <i>Characteristics of participating schools</i> |                                             |                                            |                                       |                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                                 | <i>Elementary<br/>schools in<br/>sample</i> | <i>Elementary<br/>schools<br/>citywide</i> | <i>High schools<br/>in<br/>sample</i> | <i>High<br/>schools<br/>citywide</i> |
| <i>Enrollment (size)*</i>                       | 722.1                                       | 628.7                                      | 1444                                  | 1550                                 |
| <i>% Low Income</i>                             | 89.0                                        | 84.3                                       | 33.6                                  | 34.7                                 |
| <i>Racial composition</i>                       |                                             |                                            |                                       |                                      |
| <i>% White</i>                                  | 7.8                                         | 11.9                                       | 12.7                                  | 12.3                                 |
| <i>% Black</i>                                  | 53.1                                        | 58.3                                       | 54.0                                  | 60.0                                 |
| <i>% Native American</i>                        | 0.2                                         | 0.2                                        | 0.1                                   | 0.1                                  |
| <i>% Asian</i>                                  | 6.8                                         | 2.6                                        | 2.1                                   | 3.8                                  |
| <i>% Hispanic</i>                               | 32.1                                        | 27.0                                       | 31.1                                  | 23.8                                 |
| <i>*October 30, 1989 Racial/Ethnic Survey</i>   |                                             |                                            |                                       |                                      |

It is important to note that our observations began in the second half of the school year and therefore do not represent all that the councils discussed or accomplished for the first year. By the time we began observing, the LSCs had elected officers and most had developed committee structures. We did not observe most of this important business.

Because we guaranteed anonymity to the schools in this sample we have provided only aggregated descriptive information. Several tables in this report contain information about individual schools (coded as Schools A to H--elementary schools--and W to Z--high schools). The information in these tables is intended to illustrate variations among councils.

Table 13

| <i>Number of LSC meetings observed</i>                   |                              |                                                           |                           |                                      |                               |                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>School</i>                                            | <i>First meeting covered</i> | <i># meetings between first observation and August 31</i> | <i># meetings covered</i> | <i>Average mtg length in minutes</i> | <i>Average # adult guests</i> | <i>Average # child guests</i> |
| <i>A</i>                                                 | 2/7/90                       | 6                                                         | 5                         | 128.0                                | 1.8                           | 2.4                           |
| <i>B</i>                                                 | 2/21/90                      | 6                                                         | 6                         | 98.3                                 | 4.3                           | 0.5                           |
| <i>C</i>                                                 | 2/6/90                       | 13                                                        | 8                         | 152.5                                | 9.4                           | 2.3                           |
| <i>D</i>                                                 | 2/13/90                      | 7                                                         | 6                         | 162.5                                | 6.5                           | 0.2                           |
| <i>E</i>                                                 | 3/14/90                      | 4                                                         | 4                         | 150.0                                | 4.3                           | 4.0                           |
| <i>F</i>                                                 | 2/21/90                      | 7                                                         | 6                         | 110.0                                | 10.2                          | 3.0                           |
| <i>G</i>                                                 | 1/28/90                      | 11                                                        | 9                         | 126.7                                | 6.8                           | 2.7                           |
| <i>H</i>                                                 | 2/21/90                      | 8                                                         | 7                         | 125.7                                | 4.9                           | 0.9                           |
| <i>W</i>                                                 | 2/15/90                      | 8                                                         | 5                         | 89.0                                 | 8.2                           | 0.4                           |
| <i>X</i>                                                 | 3/21/90                      | 4                                                         | 3                         | 121.7                                | 3.3                           | 0.0                           |
| <i>Y</i>                                                 | 2/22/90                      | 8                                                         | 7                         | 105.7                                | 33.6                          | 1.6                           |
| <i>Z</i>                                                 | 3/13/90                      | 8                                                         | 8                         | 135.0                                | 15.6                          | 0.1                           |
| <i>ELEM</i>                                              |                              | 62                                                        | 51                        | 131.5                                | 6.3                           | 1.9                           |
| <i>HS</i>                                                |                              | 28                                                        | 23                        | 114.4                                | 17.9                          | 0.6                           |
| <i>ALL</i>                                               |                              | 90                                                        | 74                        | 126.2                                | 9.9                           | 1.5                           |
| Schools A-H are elementary schools, W-Z are high schools |                              |                                                           |                           |                                      |                               |                               |

### Coding Procedure

Staff members developed the codes and coded the topics in group work sessions using topic summaries. The codes were revised many times to make them more appropriate for the data. In cases where the group was unsure of a code, one or two staff members checked the field notes and assigned a code. After each topic was coded, two staff members (one of whom had not been involved in the initial coding) independently coded the topics based on the topic summaries. Most topics were coded consistently by all staff members involved. In those cases where there were discrepancies in individual coding, the staff together chose the final coding.

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